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# BEADLE'S

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## The Curbstone Detective

OR,

### Harry Hale's Big Beat.

BY CHARLES MORRIS,  
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GAGE," "FRED HATYARD," "FRED FLYER  
THE REPORTER DETECTIVE," ETC.

#### CHAPTER I.

##### LOST AND FOUND.

"TELL yer what it is, Jake, it's 'most 'bout time you and me was strikin' out fer a new biz. We'm gettin' too old fer shinin'."

"Dunno but ye're 'bout got it there, Harry. Nickles don't roll in's fast as they used ter, an it takes more to keep us 'an it did when we was little stubs."

"IMPERDINCE AND POLISH—THEM'S MY LINE O' BIZNESS; NOW GO ON WITH YER THIEF-CATCHIN," AND HARRY SETTLED BACK ON HIS BOX DELIBERATELY.



"Yer head's level there, Jake."

The speakers were a brace of boys who were comfortably seated on the curbstone of a New York side thoroughfare. The boxes beside them and their generally dilapidated attire indicated that their business was that of "polishing the understanding." But both were well grown, and looked too old for their business.

"I'm layin' out my hooks," continued Jake. "Had some chin music yesterday with the cap'n of a fishin' smack down there on the East River. Reckon it's goin' to be a go. 'I'm goin' to be a jolly fisherman,'" he sung.

"That's prime," rejoined Harry. "I ain't got nothin' laid. It's all blue ahead. But, it's a-comin', Jake. I kin feel it in my bones."

"The blazes you kin! What kind o' feelin' is it? 'Tain't nothin' like toothache, or sick?"

"Yer needn't be sniggerin'. It's in my bones, I tell yer. Ye'd be kind o' s'prised ter see a big lump o' gold tumble right down 'fore me, I reckon."

"Maybe I mought, and maybe I moughtn't; but I guess we'd go snacks if it did."

"Well, 'twon't be a lump o' gold: I tell you that aforehand. But my fortune's comin', fer all that. An' 'tain't fur off, nuther. Did yer ever hear o' second sight, Jake?"

"Nary time. 'Tain't nothin' like them there eyeglasses, is it?"

"It's a kind of eyeglasses on ther brain, that let's a feller see what's a-comin'. I've got it. Ther's somethin' a-comin'."

"'Tain't a cop's club, is it? Or three months in the lock-up fur playin' Zip Coon?"

Harry turned in disgust from his unappreciative companion, and looked out moodily over the scene before him.

The street was a busy one. Carriages, drays, and business wagons, dashed or dragged to and fro. In the center ran a line of street cars, the well filled vehicles rushing by at frequent intervals.

The pavement was well thronged with foot passengers, some hurrying as if life and death depended on a moment, others loitering as if their only business was to kill time.

The pair of curbstone "operators" seemed stranded in the midst of a great stream of human life, which ebbed and flowed constantly around them.

As Harry sat looking moodily into the street, an event was preparing in which he had a more vital interest than he dreamed of. That change in the tide of his life and fortune of which he had spoken was at hand.

A street-car dashed past, well filled with passengers. From the door of a business-house near by a man ran, hurrying for this car as if it was the last for the day.

He was an oldish person, portly in dimensions, dressed in sober and respectable black, and hardly the figure for such a wild dash. He was infected with the true New York spirit, to save the minutes whatever became of the hours.

Harry's eyes involuntarily followed him. He caught the car, seized the side-iron with a frantic clutch, and got his foot on the step after a jerk that almost broke his hold. Breathing hard, the old fellow entered the car and took his seat.

Harry's eyes had noted something else. The jerk he received had thrown from his pocket a heavy leather book, which fell to the ground unnoticed by him.

"By Jimminy! there's that lump o' gold now!" ejaculated the boy, springing to his feet and darting hastily into the street.

In a minute he had the wallet. The car had gained some twenty feet in advance. Harry looked after it, and was about starting in pursuit when a clutch upon his arm stopped him. He turned hastily. There was Jake, looking at him with an avaricious glance.

"Snacks!" he ejaculated. "That was ther bargain. I want my sheer."

"In what?"

"That there pocketbook."

"Why, you blamed blue-p'int eyster, that pocketbook ain't yourn nor mine neither! Yer don't s'pose I'm no thief, Jake Brown? I ain't made that way. It's that old coon's, and I'm goin' ter take it to him, you bet."

This short conference had allowed the car to get half a block in advance. Harry broke loose from the grasp of his comrade and dashed along the street, threading his way in and out among the vehicles as only a genuine gamin can.

"Blame his derved picter!" growled Jake, "he's too thunderin' honest! Mought ha' waited fer the reward, anyway. I bet high that old coon don't guv him the price of a shiner."

In this last conjecture Jake was right, as Harry was destined to discover.

The boy continued his pursuit of the car, taking more than one risk of being knocked down by a passing vehicle, whose drivers bothered themselves very little about the fate of a bootblack. The car had gained a block and a half from the point of the loss before Harry overtook it, and sprang upon the platform with the agility of a squirrel.

Into the car he dashed, heedless of the dubious looks of the conductor. The loser of the wallet sat there in calm ignorance of his loss, intently engaged in studying some financial calculations upon a sheet of writing paper. His soul seemed absorbed in the making of money.

"Say, mister, didn't you lose somethin'?" ejaculated Harry, with what breath remained after his plunge.

"Lose somethin'?" exclaimed the old gentleman, looking up. "Have you lost your head, boy?"

"No, nor I ain't found yours: and I wouldn't be much better off if I had," retorted Harry. "If you didn't lose nothin' then I didn't find nothin', that's all."

The old man hastily thrust his hand into the breast pocket of his coat, and a sudden look of consternation came upon his face.

"My pocketbook!" he exclaimed. "It is gone! Have you got it, boy?"

"Thought ye didn't lose nothin', and I lost my head."

"Hand it here, instantly!" cried the old fellow, angrily.

"Well, yer needn't git on yer ear 'bout it; that's what I'm yere for. I didn't race this car 'most two blocks to catch a butterfly."

Harry produced the wallet, which he had hitherto held behind him, as he spoke.

The old man's face, which had been a combination of fright and offended dignity, lightened up at this spectacle. With a quick snatch he jerked the wallet from Harry's grasp, his eyes, as he did so, having all the avaricious look of a miser.

A quick scrutiny at the fat leather receptacle convinced him that it was his. Tightly clutching it with one hand, he thrust the fingers of the other into his vest pocket, fished up a piece of money, and handed it to the waiting boy.

"Here, my lad. And I'm much obliged to you for your honesty."

Harry looked at the coin in his hand. It was a ten-cent piece! A change came over his face. He held it up that all in the car might observe it.

"D'ye see that, folks? If that's guv for reward it's a mighty little pertater out of a big patch."

A laugh in the car followed this speech. A look of anger came upon the old man's face.

"If it's guv to pay me fur honesty it's too big. Honesty don't take no pay."

Turning to the old fellow, he flung the coin disdainfully into his lap.

"Guess you'd best keep this, mister. It won't pay for a dinner at Delmonico's, where I generally grub. An' you mought want it to pay for your next plate of poor-house soup."

A shout of laughter in the car intensified the anger which had been growing on the old man's face. At this last thrust he rose in a fury and strove to grasp him by the collar. He might as well have tried to catch an eel. Harry darted back, pursued by the infuriated old man, who kicked at him viciously as he leaped from the car.

The boy's spring brought him to the ground in a heap. A look of satisfaction came upon the old fellow's face, as he saw the impudent bootblack thus stretched on the earth. He returned into the car, oblivious of the fact that he had failed to return the wallet to his pocket. It had been held in his hand during the scene of excitement. It was no longer there!

The old gentleman regained his seat, breathing heavily and perspiring freely from his exertion. He mopped his face with his handkerchief, and fanned himself for a moment with it, while from all parts of the car looks of scorn and contempt were cast upon him. Evidently all present took the boy's part.

The car had gone two or three blocks before he recovered sufficiently from his excitement and heat to regain his usual judgment. Then his hand traveled involuntarily to his pocket, to ascertain if the recovered wallet was safely there.

He started as if he had been stung by a hornet, while his face grew fiery red.

"By all that's devilish!" he exclaimed, "it's gone again!"

A roar of laughter burst from all in the car at this. There was not one there who was not glad to see the old fellow overreached.

"You had it in your hand when you ran after the boy," said a young man in the corner. "He has got it again, and you're the worst sold old Plutonium New York."

"Stop the car, conductor! Stop the car!"

The old fellow hustled back, and leaped from the car before it was half stopped, in consequence of which he emulated Harry's feat of measuring his length in the dust of the street.

A renewed laugh greeted him as he scrambled to his feet and hurried away. Evidently he had not left much sympathy behind him.

All this was lost on the old miser. Only one thought filled his mind as he ran at full speed down the street, jostling against many indignant individuals. The loss of his treasure was all he could think of.

Reaching the point of the recent affray, as nearly as he could locate it, he looked with an eager and frightened air around him. Harry was nowhere visible. No trace of the wallet was to be seen. For a block or two he sought it, asking questions of all he met. It was all in vain. No one had seen the affray. None had found the wallet. No one had noticed the boy. After half an hour of fruitless labor the loser gave it up, and walked away with a dreadfully downcast countenance. He had played and lost. Meanwhile what had become of the boy and the wallet? Let us see.

When Harry scrambled to his feet, after his involuntary roll upon mother earth, it was with no pleasant feelings toward his assailant.

"The money-grabbing old curmudgeon," he grumbled. "Blame his ugly pictur! I've most knocked my nose flat gettin' way from him. But, my eyes, didn't I salt him heavy! I don't b'lieve there never was nobody madder. Poor-house soup! That was a good one!"

He burst into a gleeful laugh, and clapped his knees with satisfaction. As he did so his laughter suddenly stopped, his form became rigid, his eyes opened wide as they fixed themselves upon a spot on the ground.

"Here's larks!" he shouted, after a moment in this attitude. "My eyes, ain't this rich? Kick me fur a rooster if the old hunks ain't gone and lost his pocketbook ag'in!"

He stopped and picked up the wallet, which lay on the ground below him. A carriage passing at that moment forced Harry to seek shelter on the pavement, but he carried his treasure with him.

"Shall I chase the car ag'in? Oh, yes, I'll chase it!" he said satirically, as he thrust the wallet into his pocket. "I told Jake Brown as my fortune was a-comin' to-day; an' it's come. I ain't goin' ter steal the old chap's money, nary time; but he ain't goin' ter git it back fur no ten cents. I'm goin' to make him advertise fur it, blame him. And he's got ter offer lively, too, 'fore I fotch in the plunder. I wouldn't do this to everybody, but that old bunch o' bones wants to be taught a thing or two."

Harry walked away with a swagger, toward the point where he had left his box. On reaching there he discovered that it had disappeared, while that of Jake's, a much inferior one, had been left in its place.

A look of anger came into the boy's face.

"He's hooked my box!" he cried. "That's like Jake Brown! He's got the blood and bones of a thief in his hide. But if I don't take the worth of my box out o' his thievin' carcass 'fore sundown you can hang me up on a clothes-line to dry! I reckon Jake Brown don't know how high a tree he's a-climbin'. I was goin' snacks with him, blame him! You bet he's got to take his sheer now in a lickin'."

Harry was as good as his word. First securing his treasure in a safe place, he spent the rest of the day in searching for his thievish companion. He found him at last, in an out of the way place on the wharves, and kept his promise. Before sundown Jake Brown was a thoroughly whipped bootblack.

Of the two he was rather the larger and stronger, but Harry had double the spirit, and was, besides, smarting under a sense of injury. In consequence Jake went home that night with sore bones and an aching conscience.

## CHAPTER II.

### HONESTY THE BEST POLICY.

OUR story next leads us to the interior of a large, but dilapidated brick building, on the East River side of New York, the residence of numerous families, who herded in here much too closely for health and comfort.

In a small and very sparsely-furnished room on an upper floor of this building sat Harry Hale, the youthful bootblack whom we have recently introduced to our readers. He was evidently at home here, for his coat was off and he



was lounging in a crazy rocking-chair with all the air of a householder.

Harry was not alone. Seated opposite him was a much older personage, a man apparently between thirty and forty years of age. He was not ill-looking in face, though he seemed to have led a fast life, and had about him marks of dissipation. There was an effort at smartness in his dress which indicated the same thing.

"I tell you," said Harry, laughing heartily, "it was jist the neatest go you ever see'd. The old hunks was sold as cheap as six herrin's for a penny."

"Good," laughed his companion. "It was rich, and no mistake. You've got the pocket-book now?"

"Ain't I, though? You bet he won't get it back for no ten cents, this time! It's a good deal too fat to sell that cheap. I'm goin' to wait now till he offers a smashin' big reward. And he's got to pony it down, too."

"I don't know," said the other, rubbing his head reflectively. "Somehow that don't look quite the square thing, Harry. Honesty has only got one side, my lad, and that's the upper side."

"What d'ye mean, Bill?" asked Harry. "I don't quite catch the hang of that."

"It isn't the thing to wait for a reward. It's your business to return the book at once."

Harry looked at his companion curiously, while a long whistle came from his lips.

"What did you git fur breakfast this mornin'?" he asked.

"Honesty's the best policy," rejoined Bill.

"Reckon maybe it is; but I didn't know it was your policy. How'm I ter know where the old rooster is, anyhow—till he puts his name in the papers?" he hastily continued.

"You can find that out from the pocketbook. There are papers in it."

"I didn't open it ter see. There's where my honesty struck in."

"Very good. But it's your business to examine far enough to find out who the owner is."

"I ain't good at readin' writin'," rejoined Harry.

"I am. And what I don't know about New York ain't worth knowing. Fetch it out, and let's run over it. If we can find out who the owner is, it's your business to take it to him at once, reward or no reward. If he was mean, Harry, that doesn't give you the right to keep what isn't yours."

Harry whistled again, with a surprised look at his companion, who appeared the personification of honest poverty. The boy was about to speak, but checked himself, rose, and crossed the floor to a closet at the side of the room.

A look of cunning came upon Bill's face as he watched him.

"Harvey Wilson's the man," he muttered to himself. "He hasn't made any secret of his loss. And I know he carries 'that' document about him. He's afraid to trust it out of his pocket. If I can only lay my hands on it, won't I make him squeal!"

Evidently Bill's honesty wasn't even skin deep. It was much more show than substance.

Harry turned from the closet with the prize in his hand. It was a leather wallet of about ten inches in length, bulged out with the pressure of its contents, and closed with a couple of stout rubber bands.

"Fat and juicy," he said, laughing, as he threw it on the table between them. "It's jist bustin' full o' bank-notes. 'Nuff there to make us both rich."

"They aren't yours, lad," rejoined Bill, shaking his head. "Don't covet what don't belong to you."

"Covetin's one thing and pocketin's another," retorted Harry. "Ther' ain't no law 'g'inst wishin', as I ever heerd tell of. I wish it was mine; and that won't hurt the owner."

"Right there, Harry," laughed Bill, as he picked up the wallet and removed the bands. "You're sound on the goose, my boy. Now let's see who's the owner. Then, if you take my advice, you'll hike it back to him, instanter."

The wallet came open in his hands as he spoke. Harry's eyes opened wide as he saw a great wad of bank-notes, laid flat in one of its compartments, and evidently of considerable value.

"Whew!" he whistled. "Most a million there, I reckon!"

"Them we've nothing to do with!" rejoined Bill. "Here's where our work comes in."

A second compartment of the book was well filled with neatly folded papers. These he took out and began to examine, Harry watching him curiously. He was not quite satisfied in his mind with Bill's sudden conversion to honesty.

Bill ran over them rapidly, one by one, a glance sufficing for each.

"Here's his name," he said, at length. "Harvey Wilson; whoever that is. Confoundedly queer he don't give his address." He checked himself suddenly, with a change of face, as he opened the next paper. It was but a flash, however; his former expression instantly returned.

He held this paper in his hand as he opened the two succeeding ones.

"Ah! here it is. Number—, Wall street. Confound it!" he ejaculated, as the papers slipped from his fingers and fell to the floor.

He stooped hastily and recovered them.

"Getting awkward in my old days," he muttered, as he laid the regained papers on the pile. "Don't he give his house address?" He ran over the few remainder. "No. 'Tisn't here. Anyhow, we've found where the old chap hangs out his shingle."

He returned the papers to the wallet, and closed it with the rubber bands.

"It's your funeral, my boy. But I'd advise you to take that back to him bright and early to-morrow morning. He'll give you something for your trouble, no doubt."

"A nickel, I reckon," muttered Harry.

"Wait, if you like it better. Maybe he'll offer a reward." Bill rose as he spoke, and put on his hat.

"Goin'?"

"Yes. Guess I'll toddle on."

"Write down them directions, won't you?"

Bill penciled the address on a slip of paper.

"Bright and early to-morrow mornin's the word," said Harry. "You're sound on the goose, dashed if you ain't! The next feller as says you're a card-sharp, I'll shut up his peepers."

Bill smiled with lofty virtue.

"When I do anything off the square the moon will come down," he said. "Da-da, Harry! Toe the mark, my lad, every time. Honesty's the best policy."

He walked from the room, Harry following him with his eyes.

"You've got to know a feller a good while 'fore you know him at all," he muttered. "Yesterday I wouldn't have left a soft-shell clam out where Bill Fisk could find it. To-day I'd leave a wagon-load of watermelons. He's pannin' out prime, he is."

As he spoke a woman bustled in from an adjoining room. Her faded, cheap attire bespoke great poverty. Her face, hardened and wrinkled by toil and privation, resembled that of the boy. She was evidently his mother.

"You've had that Bill Fisk here again!" she cried sharply. "Haven't I told you to have nothing to do with that man? He's not safe company for you."

"Mebbe ye're too hard on him, mother."

"Not a bit. He's a bad lot."

"Anyhow he talks straight as a die. He wants me to take it back instanter to the owner, and not wait for the reward. He says that's the way straight folks act."

"He said that?" she dropped into a chair.

"Yes, and he went through it and never laid a finger on the money."

Mrs. Hale sat bolt upright in her chair.

"Sure of that?"

"Dead sure; I watched him."

"What did he open it for?"

"To find out who the owner was. Here's his name. Bill found it on one of the papers. You needn't look, mother. He didn't touch a penny. Bill acted square up."

"And he told you to take it back, and not wait for the reward?"

"He did that."

"There's a screw loose somewhere," rejoined Mrs. Hale, solemnly. "A leopard don't change his spots; that's the Bible truth. Wait; we'll see."

She got up and left the room, as if quite overcome by the news.

Harry followed her with a smile of confidence on his face.

"She's struck funny," he said to himself. "But, I'll bet my money on Bill Fisk. He giv me good advice, anyhow. Dunno what he'd done if he'd found the prize, but you've got ter giv a feller credit fur what you know."

Harry was as good as his word. At an early business hour of the next day he set out in search of the Wall street office of Harvey Wilson, the valuable find safely laid away in the inner pocket of his coat.

He found the office without difficulty. The sign outside read:

"HARVEY WILSON,

"BANKER AND BROKER."

Inside, a half dozen clerks were busily at

work, and piles of money indicated the money-changing business of the establishment.

"Mr. Wilson in?" asked Harry, independently.

The clerk addressed looked at him superciliously from head to foot.

"Yes; but can't be seen."

"Can't, eh? Not with a spy-glass?" queried Harry, who did not like his tone.

"Come, young man, none of your bootblack slack!"

"How'm I goin' to shine him up if I can't see him?"

"Shine him up, is it?"

"Yep."

"He'll shine you up, if you don't slide."

"See here, my duck, if he know'd you was playin' this on me, my eyes, wouldn't he giv you a jolly eye-opener! I'm here on biz, I tell you; bustlin' biz! So make tracks and tell the old man I'm a-waitin'."

By this time the attention of all in the office was drawn to this conversation, and some of them were laughing at Harry's independence of manner.

An older personage stepped up.

"What is it, my lad?" he asked. "What is your business with Mr. Wilson? He is too busy to see any one except on important business."

"That's me!" ejaculated Harry. "Important? You bet! I've got somethin' in my pocket he'd giv half the money round yere to git."

"What? Are you the finder of his lost pocket wallet?"

"That ain't fur from the size of it."

"That is quite another affair. Give it to me and I will take it in to him."

"It don't weigh more nor a ton, mister. I reckon I've got grit enough to carry anything under a ton. If you're 'fraid I can't, s'pose you carry me an' the pocketbook both."

"Come, come, youngster, you are too fresh."

"That's why you want to salt me, is it? I'm 'sponsible for that pocketbook. If Mr. Wilson's too busy to take it I'll give him my address and he kin toddle round and git where I hang out."

Harry's first questioner had now the laugh on his successor.

"You're a prime one," said the latter, a little sourly. "Wait, I'll see if Mr. Wilson will receive you."

"Tell him not to put hisself out. 'I kin wait. I'll jist toddle down to the Park, an' shine up a few jobs while he's gettin' ready."

The gentleman evidently thought that silence was the best policy with Harry, for he made no response. Laughter from the other clerks followed him as he entered the inner office.

Harry took a seat and whistled quietly to himself while waiting. He could not see what they found to laugh at.

He did not have to wait long. The gentleman returned after a minute.

"Walk in," he said; "Mr. Wilson will see you."

"I reckon he will if I walk in."

Harry strode independently into the inner office, none too well pleased by his reception in the outer.

He recognized at a glance the gentleman who sat here. It was his late street-car acquaintance. He seemed to recognize Harry as well.

"So it is you that have got it!" he said sourly.

"You waited till the reward brought you, eh? It took a fifty dollar offer to stir you up to honesty."

"Fifty dollars!" ejaculated Harry. "That's prime. I didn't know 'bout it, mister. My honesty ain't that sort. But, I reckon I'll rake it in all the same. It's better than ten cents."

"You didn't know of it? Then how did you find your way here?"

"Found your name and place of biz on some of the papers—here's the thing, Mr. Wilson. And I'm 'bout as glad to git rid of it as you are to git it."

Harry took the wallet from his pocket and tossed it on the desk in front of Mr. Wilson. He seated himself, while the latter hastily snatched it up and began a nervous examination of its contents.

He took out the roll of notes and hastily counted them.

"You'll find them 'bout right," assured Harry. "I ain't kept out even my ten cents."

A few minutes sufficed to satisfy the banker.

"Yes, they are all here," he said. He lifted his eyes and looked at Harry with a different expression from that he had worn. Friendliness had taken the place of distrust.

"Then s'pose you fork over that there fifty. I didn't know 'bout it, but I reckon you ain't the sort to flunk on yer word."

"You have fairly earned it, my boy. I acted



foolishly and hastily the other day. I owe you some reparation."

He counted out some notes from the bundle in his hand, and passed them to Harry.

"Here is your reward," he said.

"Much 'bliged," rejoined the boy, thrusting them into his pocket with as much carelessness as if he was used to receiving such sums.

While he did this Mr. Wilson occupied himself with running over the papers in his wallet.

"Now I reckon I'll git."

Harry rose and stretched himself, slapped his pocket to see if the notes were all right, and walked toward the door.

"Hold!" cried the banker, in an altered tone.

Harry turned. A remarkable change of expression had come upon the old man's face. He was pale as a corpse and wore a look of deep fright.

"The paper!" he gasped. "Where is it? The missing paper?"

"What missing paper, mister?"

"Do you mean to say you have not abstracted a paper?"

"Nary paper."

"You lie, you young thief!" Mr. Wilson rose and rushed to the door. "Jones, run for a policeman! All of you see that this young rascal don't escape! I've been robbed!"

### CHAPTER III.

#### WHO STOLE THE PAPER?

THERE was considerable curiosity and debate in the outer office of the Wilson banking establishment during the clerk's journey in search of a policeman, but in the private office quiet reigned supreme.

After his first outbreak, and a few short questions which Harry answered as shortly, Mr. Wilson relapsed into silence, and began again to examine his papers, with a very disturbed face. Harry, on his part, picked up a newspaper, settled himself comfortably, and began to read.

They had not long to wait. Within ten minutes the messenger returned, accompanied by a stalwart officer of the force.

"Here, my good fellow, I want you to take this boy into custody," exclaimed the banker, more sharply than politely.

The officer looked inquiringly from one to the other, while an expression of recognition marked his face as he gazed on the boy's knowing countenance. Harry, indeed, met his gaze with a decided wink.

"On what charge?" asked the officer.

"Robbery," returned the banker. "Take him in charge at once."

"I reckon not!" rejoined Harry.

"Why not?"

"He ain't got no warrant. That's why. Can't tetch this chicken 'bout a warrant."

"Very true," rejoined the officer. "I have no right to arrest any one on an indefinite charge. You will need a magistrate's warrant. What has the boy really done, if I may ask?"

"He has a stolen a valuable paper from my pocketbook."

"Is there not some mistake, Mr. Wilson? I know this boy well. He bears an excellent reputation."

"Ax him how I come ter have his smashin' old book," broke in Harry.

"He found it," rejoined Mr. Wilson. "I advertised for it and he brought it back. He has taken a paper from it worth far more than all the rest of the contents."

The officer looked at him inquiringly. Mr. Wilson was evidently very much disturbed and agitated. He was certainly not his usual self.

"How much money did the book contain?" asked the officer.

"About two thousand dollars."

"Very well. And this paper, which is worth so much to you, what would it be worth to this boy?"

Mr. Wilson hesitated and stammered. This question put the matter in a new light.

"Nothing, likely," he managed to say.

"Then he has returned you two thousand in money, and kept a worthless piece of paper? This is not robbery, Mr. Wilson. If the paper is lost, it must have been by accident."

This was a common sense view of the case. The banker began to look as if he had been too hasty.

"I never tetched the paper nor the money neither," exclaimed Harry indignantly. "You know me," he continued to the officer, "Did ye ever know me do anything that weren't on the dead square? It's all taffy 'bout that paper. He giv me ten cents fur findin' that pocketbook; and now he's giv me a fifty, he wants ter git it back by rakin' up that yarn 'bout a paper. Ther' weren't no paper. It's all a go."

"How about this?" asked the officer of Mr. Wilson. "May you not be mistaken about the paper being in your pocketbook?"

"No. It was there. There is no question about that."

"I never tuk it," exclaimed Harry. "I never opened the blamed old book."

"That doesn't agree with your former story," rejoined Mr. Wilson. "You said you found my name and address on some of the papers—and come to think of it, that was a lie. My address is not on any of them."

"I reckon it is, then. Bill Fisk found it. Here it is. He wrote it down for me."

Harry produced the written address.

"Bill Fisk!" cried the officer, quickly. "How was he mixed in it?"

"Tell ye how," rejoined Harry. "This is the way it was: Bill Fisk said as how 'twasn't honest ter keep it fur a reward, and axed me ter fetch it right back. He said he'd look through it and find where the owner lived. And so he did. And this is what he found." He pointed to the written address.

"Bill Fisk? He did this?"

"Sure as shootin'."

The officer whistled in a knowing manner.

"You know this Fisk?" asked Mr. Wilson, quickly.

"He's one of the keenest rascals in New York."

"Then he has the paper."

"His show of honesty is suspicious, anyhow. You say your address is not in the book?"

"No."

"Did any one know you had lost it?"

"Yes. I talked of it some."

"Who knows the value of the lost paper besides yourself?"

"Only one person in the world. And he is in the Rocky Mountains."

"You are mistaken, Mr. Wilson," rejoined the officer, confidently. "This man, Bill Fisk, knows about it. He has the paper, and intends to use it."

"He hain't!" cried Harry. "I was kinder 'feared of him and watched him sharp. He didn't take no paper."

"Sure of that? Didn't he distract your attention?"

"Dunno what you mean by 'stractin' my 'tention. He did drop some o' ther papers on the floor, but he picked 'em right up ag'in."

A slight laugh broke from the officer's lips.

"You're not old enough, my lad, for Bill Fisk. He has done you neatly. Do you see how it is, Mr. Wilson?" he continued. "The boy is innocent. This rascal's pretending to honesty is proof enough that he had some scheme in train. He has the paper. Think a moment. Did you ever know the man? Can you recall him?"

Mr. Wilson shook his head.

"He knows you, then. He knows the value of that lost paper. And if it gives him any squeeze on you, he's going to use that squeeze for all it's worth. Take my word for that."

Mr. Wilson looked at the officer admiringly.

"You should have been in the detective service," he said. "You are wasting your talents on the street force. You are right. This Fisk has the lost paper."

"Then the scootin' blackguard's shet up both my peepers!" exclaimed Harry, in a burst of passion. "It struck me comical when he giv me all that taffy 'bout honesty's the best policy. If I hadn't been the biggest fool in New York—and that's bein' a scrougin' big one—I'd seen through his little game. But, I'm goin' to git even with him. If I ain't, salt me fur a mackerel."

"What is to be done?" asked Mr. Wilson of the officer.

"This Fisk must be looked after, arrested, and searched. His rooms must be searched.—I am afraid this plan will be of little use. The fellow is no beginner.—But it is the first thing to be done."

"What next?"

"There isn't any next. The next don't begin 'till the first is through."

"I know where he hangs out," announced Harry, excitedly. "And I know some of his sportin' places. I'm on this lay!"

"Will you take the job?" asked Mr. Wilson of the officer. "I will pay you handsomely for the return of that paper."

"You will need a detective. I have not the time nor the experience for such work."

"Can you recommend a good detective?"

"Yes. By the way, I will be off duty in half an hour. If you wish, I will, with the boy's aid, look up Bill Fisk and search his rooms. He may not yet have got rid of his prize. If you

will obtain a search-warrant, Mr. Wilson, from the nearest magistrate, I will return in half an hour."

"Very good. I will do so."

"And I'll hang 'bout here and see how they make money out o' paper," broke in Harry. "It's a nice little trade as I'd like to learn. It beats blackin' hollow."

The officer laughed as he walked away to his post of duty. Mr. Wilson followed him quickly to obtain the warrant. Harry seated himself in a corner of the banking office to learn the skillful art of which he had spoken.

"How is this, young fellow?" asked the elderly clerk who had spoken to him before. "Mr. Wilson sent for a policeman to arrest you. How is it you are at liberty?"

"He bit off more than he could chew, that's the long and short o't," rejoined Harry. "He tried to climb up the wrong tree."

"What is the difficulty, my lad?"

"It's a bit o' flummery, that's what!"

"Yes, but the nature of it?"

"It ain't got no nature. It's all huckleberry puddin'."

"But what has happened? What did he accuse you of stealing?"

All the other clerks were listening curiously. "Don't b'lieve he knows that hisself. He's off his base, the old man is."

"But there was some charge. How came he to let you off?"

"He got holt of a hot 'tater when he picked me up. Burnt his fingers and had ter drap me."

"But what did you steal? Or what did he say you stole?"

"How much do you git a day fur pumpin', mister? Yer ought to git paid mighty well, fur it's goin' to be mighty hard work ter fetch 'ile."

"Why, you cantankerous young rascal! are you poking fun at me?"

Harry's answers and the laughter of the others had considerably riled the questioner.

"Nary fun. But it's 'way down deep, and you'll have ter pump hard. I know Mr. Wilson wants me to keep shady; and I'm the shadiest little coon you ever see'd when I sets out fur it."

A roar of laughter followed, and the boy's questioner retired discomfited.

"You found his pocketbook?" asked another.

"Yes."

"What did he give you?"

"Ten cents. An' didn't even offer me a hoss and cart to haul it home in."

"What did you do with it?"

"Flung it back and told him to buy poor-house soup with it."

"You were a confounded little fool, then," rejoined the other. "You don't know Mr. Wilson. He is not the miser he seems."

"He plays it well, anyhow!"

"He is peculiar," rejoined the clerk. "That is one of his old tricks. If you had taken the ten cents he would have rewarded you properly."

"You bet he has, then," returned Harry, slapping his pocket. "I've got a fifty here. I'm just the richest little snoozer this side the Atlantic."

Further conversation was prevented by the entrance of customers, and during the remainder of Harry's stay the attendants were too busy to ask questions.

At the end of the time fixed Mr. Wilson returned, and soon after the policeman entered, dressed in citizen's clothes.

The remainder of the day was spent by Harry and his "friend on the force," Will Wallace by name, in search of Fisk. But no Fisk was to be found.

Harry had known him for several months, in a boyish way, and had been somewhat cultivated by Fisk, who liked the boy's shrewd wit. He therefore had some knowledge of his ordinary places of resort and associates. But in none of these was he to be found, and no one could give any information concerning him.

His place of residence was next visited. He occupied two rooms in a shabby house. There was little furniture in these apartments, and the search of them did not take long. It ended as might have been expected. No trace of the missing paper was found. Fisk had not been fool enough to leave such a document lying round loose.

Harry spent the next day in search of his recent associate. He even enlisted a corps of bootblacks in the service. The policeman, Wallace, joined in as soon as he was relieved from duty. But the search ended as it had done the day before. No trace of Fisk was forthcoming.

On the succeeding morning Wallace, the po-



man, entered Wilson's office. The latter was busy examining his mail.

"The thing is too deep for me," remarked the officer. "Fisk has gone out of sight. He evidently means business. Nothing remains but to put a keen detective on his track."

"You said you could recommend one," answered Mr. Wilson, as he continued to open his letters.

"I think I know the man you want. He is a Pinkerton officer, who has not been long in the service, but is said to be sharp as a razor."

"Send him here. I will make it all right with you for your trouble. This man must be found. Ha! What's this?" The letter at which he had just glanced dropped from his fingers, while his face grew suddenly pale.

"What is the matter, Mr. Wilson?"

"He is at work already!" cried the banker, snatching up the letter and running his eyes over it again. "It is as I feared. The affair is going to be an awkward one."

"What is it, sir?"

"Blackmail! He knows the value of his find, and is trying the squeeze game already. Here is a demand for a thousand dollars secrecy money."

"You will not give it?"

"I dare not refuse!" rejoined the banker helplessly. "You little know what the loss of that paper means to me. I would give a small fortune for its recovery."

#### CHAPTER IV.

##### THE STRANGER FROM LEADVILLE.

THE next morning Wallace, the policeman, introduced his friend, the Pinkerton detective, to Mr. Wilson.

"This is the man I told you of," he said. "Mr. Francisco Finelli. He is an Italian, you see, but sharp as a Yankee. I fancy he will do your work for you."

Mr. Wilson looked up inquiringly at the man who stood before him. He was slim and of middle height, but wiry looking. His complexion was very dark, his hair jet-black, while black whiskers and mustaches adorned his face. He wore a thick rimmed pair of spectacles, and in no respect was the sort of looking man the banker expected to see.

"Glad to see you, Mr. Finelli," said the banker, with a nod. "Has Mr. Wallace told you what I want?"

"We have talked it over a leetle," answered the detective, with a very slight foreign accent, and in a somewhat hoarse voice.

"And can you take hold of the case?"

"I must know all about it first."

At this hint Mr. Wilson invited his visitors to be seated and entered into an explanation of the circumstances; taking care, however, not to reveal the nature of the missing paper.

"Let me see that blackmail letter."

The detective examined the letter closely.

"Handwriting deesguised," he remarked. "Are you going to send this money, Mr. Weelson?"

"I must. He threatens to make public that paper. I would not have it published for five times the sum."

"Very goot, sir. I see. It must be kept secret. You are to send a messenger to meet him in Central Park, and he is to make a certain sign so that the messenger will know him."

"Can I not have an officer in hiding, to follow and arrest him?"

The detective shook his head.

"No. This man is cute. He will not carry that paper. If he is arrested his friend will make the paper public."

"What do you advise?" asked Mr. Wilson, rubbing his head reflectively.

As he spoke the door of the office opened, and Harry Hale, the bootblack, entered, box in hand.

"Want a shine, any o' you gen'lemen?"

"No."

"On that biz, be ye? Well, I'm on that biz, too! Like to hear what yer got to say?"

He turned his box on end, and seated himself without waiting for an invitation.

"Young man, it seems to me you are not wanting in impudence," from Mr. Wilson, severely.

"Couldn't never git along if I was. Imperdence and polish—their's my line o' bizness; now go on with your thief-catchin'," and Harry settled on his box deliberately.

"You keep your polish in your box, I fancy. You are one of my detectives, though, so I suppose you can stay. Here's your brother officer, Mr. Finelli."

Harry looked at the Italian curiously. He seemed rather taken aback at the appearance of the detective.

"Well, I'm dished," he ejaculated. "A Dago detective. Looks sharp, though. Hand us your paw, Fin."

"You'll get it on your ear, youngster, if you get it at all," rejoined the officer, angrily.

"Gittin' on your ear, be ye?" retorted the boy. "High set up, I reckon. All right, if yer don't keer to shake, I don't." Harry settled comfortably back on his box again.

Mr. Finelli turned away with an expressive shrug of his shoulders.

"Have you a messenger you can trust to hold his tongue?" he asked Mr. Wilson.

"I am afraid not."

"Very well. I propose this: I will be your messenger."

"Ah! that is well-advised. But you may be known to the New York rogues."

"No. I am from Chicago. I only been here a short time. They know me not. I will give this man the money, see his face, and take him if I can."

"Good! Very good!"

"It may not be easy, Mr. Weelson. Some men are hard to follow, without making them suspicious. If it were safe to arrest him on the spot—"

"That would never do," rejoined Mr. Wilson, hastily. "Your plan is a good one. Let it be followed. I will provide you with the money."

"Very goot, sir. I now know where I stand. This is the first step. What follows must depend on this."

"It isn't a bad idea," broke in Wallace. "To send a detective as messenger!—the fellow will never dream of it."

"There's on'y one thing better," remarked Harry.

"What is that?"

"Send me as messenger! I know Bill Fisk like a breeze."

"And Bill Fisk knows you. That game wouldn't work."

"Maybe not. I don't want ter handle none o' the old man's money, anyhow. He'd snatch me next for stealin' some o' that."

"Why, you impudent young hound!" exclaimed Mr. Wilson, angrily. "I'm the old man, am I? That's polite, at all events. Get out of this instantly, or I'll break some of your bones."

"Didn't mean it, Mr. Wilson. It came out. That's what they call you behind yer back, anyhow. I never goes behind no man's back."

"They call me?—Who?"

"Tain't tellin's, Mr. Wilson. If I'd let that cat out the bag, next thing I'd let out some o' your cats. I don't tell nobody's secrets 'cept my own."

"That's a good rule, boy," remarked Mr. Finelli, approvingly.

"You bet it is!—We're goin ter be pard's in this job, Fin. Let's git out and chin it over. I kin let you inter some p'int's."

"All right," rejoined the detective, with a laugh. "When will you be ready for me, Mr. Weelson?"

"In an hour."

"Very good. In one hour I be back."

The two officers and the boy left the office, and proceeded through the outer banking room to the street.

As they left the front door of the establishment a man turned from the street toward it at sight of whom Mr. Finelli gave a perceptible start.

Harry, who had familiarly taken his arm, felt the quiver run through him and looked up quickly into his face.

There was a strange expression on it, which he could not understand, and a suppressed exclamation came from his lips.

All this passed in an instant. The detective was quickly himself again. He had evidently had a decided surprise.

Harry turned his eyes keenly on the man who had caused this sensation.

He was a tall, somewhat stout personage, dressed rather shabbily, and with something of a western cut in his garb. The face was weatherbeaten, and showed evident signs of dissipation. There was something in the cut of his features not unlike those of Mr. Wilson, though the expression was entirely different.

He passed them without notice, and entered the banking-house. Harry, with his usual impulsiveness, was about to speak to the detective concerning his surprise, but checked himself, and looked again into the face of his companion. The lips were set, and there was a peculiar glimmer in the eyes.

"See'd him afore, eh?" said the boy to himself. "There's somethin' shady twixt the two o' ye. But, I reckon 'tain't none o' my biz."

The officers walked away, conversing as they did so, while Harry contented himself with listening. He was rather proud of his connection with a genuine detective.

Meanwhile the man whose appearance had startled the detective entered the banking-house, and requested to see Mr. Wilson. After some parleying, it appearing that he had business of importance, he was admitted into the private office.

Mr. Wilson was seated at his table, busily engaged on some papers that lay spread before him, and did not look up at his visitor. The latter shut the door carefully behind him, and stood with his back against it, gazing down with a meaning glance upon the banker.

As they remained thus the likeness between them, which Harry had noticed, became very evident. It was intensified by an avaricious look that marked both faces.

A minute or two passed. Mr. Wilson seemed to have forgotten that he had a visitor.

The stranger evidently soon grew tired of this.

"Harvey," he said, with a peculiar intonation.

Mr. Wilson looked up with astonishing quickness on hearing this voice. He not only looked up, but sprang hastily to his feet, with such suddenness as to send his chair tumbling to the floor.

"Georgel!" broke in husky accent from his lips, while his face grew ashy pale.

"You haven't forgotten me, at any rate. You still have eyes for a brother."

"You here!" gasped the banker. He had to put both hands on the table to keep himself erect. "You!—By Heaven, man—"

"There, there, Harvey! Keep your temper. That's your old way, bursting out like beer out of a bottle. Keep cool now. It will pay better."

"Keep cool!" exclaimed the banker, in a growing passion. His face, from being pale, had now turned red. "You profligate rascal, if you had your deserts you wouldn't be walking about here at liberty. So you have come here to dog me, have you?"

"This isn't kind, Harvey," said the other, a little abashed. "It isn't brotherly."

"Brotherly! I disown you as a brother. What brings you here? So you have chosen to break our compact." His voice was very harsh.

"You broke it first, Harvey. You refused to send that last remittance. I can't live on stones. I must have cash."

"I have sent you your allowance. If you choose to gamble it away, or spend it for drink, that is your affair. I will not add a penny to it."

"You're too hard, Harvey. I don't have enough to live on. Tell you what, old chap, hand me over that note. I'll burn it before your eyes, and will never ask you for another cent."

Mr. Wilson looked at him keenly.

"Is that what brings you here? You have traveled from Leadville to New York to make that proposition?"

"That's about the size of it."

"Well, you can take the next train back. I have got you by the throat, you rascal, and intend to keep you there. I am not quite fool enough to put the power into your hands. Perhaps you are not aware that I can send you for five years to the Penitentiary by a turn of the hand."

A fierce oath came from the lips of the visitor.

"I'll have that, or somebody'll get hurt," he hissed. "You're playing it on me too rough, Harvey Wilson."

"You would like to have the half of my estate, wouldn't you? To throw it to the dogs, or waste it in dissipation? Well, you will not get it. What is more, you will not receive a penny from me while you remain in New York. You can only have your allowance in case you remain in the West."

The visitor looked at his resolute brother with a strange expression. For the moment it seemed as if he were about to leap upon him with the fury of a tiger.

Mr. Wilson retreated a step and laid his hand on a bell-pull behind him.

"That won't work, George. We are not in the wilds of the West, now. They don't do things that way in New York."

George Wilson threw himself in a chair, breathing heavily as he did so. He seemed to be repressing some strong passion.

"Tell you what, Harvey," he said. "You are playing it rough on a fellow. I am not going to hurt you. I could kill you if I chose before



you could ring that bell. We learn those things in the West. But I don't mean you any harm. I want money, that's all. I've spent my last copper to come here."

"If I give you enough to take you back, will you go?"

"What's to keep me when I get there?"

"I will send you some money then. I will not give a penny now more than for food and passage."

"You're hard on a chap, old lad. I'd like to see a bit of life hereaway."

"Very well. You'll see it starving. Back you must go instantly, or I'll cut off the allowance for good."

He spoke with inflexible resolution. George Wilson looked in his face, and weakened at what he saw there.

"I suppose I'll have to take it," he muttered. "You're a hard man, Harvey."

"Come back here at three o'clock. I will have your ticket for Denver and some money for you. Leave me now; I am busy."

The visitor lounged out of the office with a subdued look in his face. His brother followed him with his eyes.

"He must go without a day's delay," he said. "If he should learn of the loss of that paper all would be at risk. The consequences might be ruinous."

On leaving the banking-house, George Wilson turned down the street. He failed to notice that a pair of keen eyes were upon him, or that a spectacled Italian put himself on his track.

But a bootblack at a distance noticed it, while a knowing look came into his face.

"Finelli's struck ile, for sure," he said. "There's somethin' up 'twixt them two chaps."

## CHAPTER V.

### HARRY MAKES A DISCOVERY.

THE last chapter left affairs in a somewhat peculiar situation: The banker overcome by the visit of his dissolute brother, and in dread of serious consequences; said brother lounging out of Wall street, followed at a distance by the detective; and at a still greater distance the bootblack, Harry Hale, on the track of the detective.

"Cause why," said Harry to himself, "this is 'bout the size of it. Fin knows somethin' shady 'bout that rooster, and that rooster's been havin' a confab with old Moneybags. The thing's kind o' mixed, fur sure. Dunno as ther's any snacks in it fur me, but I'm goin' to trail 'em, anyhow."

It was very evident that George Wilson had not spent all his life in the West. He was no stranger in New York. He walked through street after street with the assurance of an old inhabitant, and finally entered a house at the end of his route like one who felt himself at home.

Finelli observed the house keenly, crossing the street and noting it from all points of view. He at length entered a neighboring alley and vanished from sight. It seemed as if he was seeking to extend his observations to the rear.

Harry sat on his box at a distance, watching him.

"My eyes!" he exclaimed. "Fin's bound ter know that house ag'in. If he'd see it in Chiny he'd know it. Wonder if he's 'feared they'll move it in the night, so's he'll have ter hunt fur it?"

Leaving his box Harry approached the house. There was nothing very peculiar about it. It had done good service and was the worse for wear, but did not differ essentially from a hundred others in that vicinity.

Having gone through the same performances outside as the officer had done, Harry followed him up the alley. He was on duty now as a detective, and thought he could do no better than to imitate an old hand at the trade.

The alley opened into another that brought him to the rear of the house. The detective had disappeared.

What had become of this worthy was not very clear. The alley ended here. There were gates leading to various houses, but they all were locked. One of them opened to the house in question. It, too, was fastened on the inside.

The boy scratched his head doubtfully. He felt nonplused.

"That Dago detective ain't a bird, nor he ain't a mole. And if he was a fish ther ain't no water here to swim in. Where's he absquatulated? He's a cute one, Fin is, you bet. I didn't know detectives could squeeze the'r-selves inter darnin' needles an' crawl through keyholes. Don't b'lieve I'd be wu'th shucks in that branch o' the biz."

He looked around him again, observing the house as well as he could over the top of the fence. From where he stood, the second floor windows could not be seen. A crack in the fence, however, enabled him to take a closer observation. One of these windows was now visible. The sash was raised, and in the opening Harry saw a head crowned by a slouch felt hat, which a glance convinced him was that of the man the detective had pursued.

"There he is—treed," said Harry to himself. "But where's Fin? That's what gits me. Reckon he's got in there somehow and is scoutin' round."

The man in the window seemed engaged in conversation, to judge by his movements, and the subdued sound of voices that came from that direction. As the young scout listened these voices grew louder.

He listened intently to hear if he could make out any words. Keen as his ears were, however, he failed in this effort. But he caught something else that gave him a start as if a hornet had stung him.

"Who's that?" he cried suddenly. "What's that? Jehosaphat, but it sounds like it! I'm goin' inter that house, fur sure."

Leaving his lurking place in the alley he sought the street again, with a look of resolution on his face.

The house door stood partly open, and without knocking or ringing Harry entered. He had no particular dread of consequences, whoever he might meet. A genuine shoeblack is not easily taken aback.

Fortunately no one was visible. He found himself in a long passage, leading to the kitchen, while midway a flight of stairs ran up.

It was these he wanted. Up the stairs he went, as cautiously as possible, though the crazy flight creaked dismally, be careful as he would. He gained the second floor, however, without giving the alarm.

Here was a second passage, opening into a side and a front room, and leading in the rear to the foot of another flight of stairs.

The sound of voices came to his ears from the side-room. The door of this was ajar. Peering through the opening he saw that a door from this room led to a second room in the rear.

This was the apartment he was in search of. The door between the two rooms was closed, but the sound of voices showed clearly where the talkers were. They evidently had no fear of listeners.

Harry glided rather than walked across the floor, making not the ghost of a sound. He applied his ear to the keyhole of the door.

"It's him, sure as shootin'!" he said, in glee. "But, where's Fin? He oughter be scoutin' round here. It'll be jolly fun if I beat him at his own biz."

The two men who seemed to be within were talking freely, without fear of a listener, and the boy had now no trouble in making out their conversation.

"Hand it over to you!" said the voice which Harry fancied he recognized. "What do you take me for? I happen to know you, Friend Wilson. If you got that in your flippers once my cake 'll be cooked. Share and share alike, that's the pirate's motto."

"And that's what you always were: a land pirate out and out," rejoined the voice of George Wilson.

"I was never your match, Georgy," came the laughing reply. "You could give me odds and beat me hollow. But I hold the trump hand this time, and you've got to follow suit.—So he ordered you out of New York, did he?"

"Yes, shoot him!"

"Well, you needn't go. We'll squeeze him; you and me."

"There ain't no sell in this?"

"Nary sell."

"Then it's a go. Here's my flipper on it. Salt his hide! he's done me out of a clean fifty thousand of the estate, and as long as he holds that doc, I daren't squeal."

"It's him that's got to squeal. I've told you what I'm up to, Georgy. It ain't a bad dodge, I take it."

"It's a good one, Bill."

Bill! This name almost brought an exclamation from the listener. Stooping, he applied his eyes instead of his ears to the keyhole, and strove to get a glimpse of the persons in the room.

In this attitude he could not hear, and at first saw nothing but the opposite wall. But steps told him that the man he wished to see was walking up and down. A minute or two brought his head in Harry's range of sight. A single glance was enough for the crouching boy. He

rose noiselessly to his feet, while a suppressed laugh convulsed his face.

"If it ain't Bill Fisk, then bile me fur a 'tater!" he ejaculated. "To think o' my nailin' Bill here! And he's got the dockment, too. He as good as said so. There's a bit o' news as the old man oughter bleed lively to git.—But where the deuce 's Fin, that he ain't nosin' it out? Dunno what ter make o' him, nobow."

"I had better go now," remarked Bill. "I will lay plans and see you to-morrow."

"Goin', are you? Then I guess I'll absquatulate," was the listener's mental remark.

Harry stole from the room as noiselessly as he had entered it. He made his way down stairs and reached the street without being seen.

He was not through, however, with his game. Bill Fisk had talked of leaving the house. Where was he going? That was the next thing Harry wanted to know.

On the opposite side of the street was a small grocery store, with a row of empty boxes along the curb.

Behind these boxes the young detective concealed himself, with nothing of him visible but the top of his head and his eyes. The latter were fixed keenly on the door of the house opposite.

Ten minutes passed, but no one appeared at the door.

"That's what he calls goin', is it?" grumbled Harry. "It's a slow go, that's all I got to say."

Ten minutes more passed. Still no one appeared. His patience was fast disappearing when the door slowly opened and a man stepped out, at sight of whom Harry almost dropped over in a faint.

It was Finelli, the detective!

"Well, salt and pepper me and gobble me down! if *that* don't beat me there's no snakes! Fin!—And I thought I was discountin' him!—If that there Dago ain't a coon ther' ain't none made. Where the sin was he? I dunno, but I bet high he's heard every word that went on 'twixt them roosters, and has got their game down fine. All I know is that they're goin' to squeeze old Moneybags. Fin's 'way ahead o' me!"

Harry's first impulse was to follow the detective and question him. But, Bill Fisk had not left the house. Finelli might not care to watch him, but the boy did. He kept up his watch for a quarter of an hour longer without seeing the man he was on the lookout for.

At the end of that time George Wilson left the house. What to do now Harry hardly knew. Should he wait longer for Fisk, or follow this suspicious stranger? A moment's thought told him that Fisk, who was decidedly in hiding, might have made his exit by the rear, and thus given him the slip. He therefore put himself on the track of the old westerner.

To his surprise, the latter led him directly to the office of Harvey Wilson.

"It's the thickest soup I ever waded in," conjectured the boy. "What the sin does he want there?"

The visit was a short one. George Wilson soon left the banking house. There was a look of satisfied cunning on his face that made Harry follow him again.

This time he was led to the office of the Erie Railroad Company, where he heard the fellow negotiating for the return of a ticket to Denver, which had been bought that day, but could not be used.

After some parley the agent accepted the ticket and returned the money, minus a discount for the trouble the company had been put to.

The next point to which Harry traced his quarry was a drinking house in the vicinity, where the stranger took a seat and began to fill himself with whisky at a diligent rate.

Harry turned away, scratching his head furiously.

"He's anchored now. If he keeps on imbibin' at that rate they kin send him home in a wheelbarrow in an hour. I bet it's mighty cur'us, the whole biz. I'd like to ax old Wilson what that chap wanted with him, on'y I'm 'feared he'd kick if I'd ax any more. And what's 'come o' Bill Fisk? And where was Finelli bid while they was confabbing. It jist gits me!"

He walked on lost in deep cogitation. His first day's experience as a detective had not panned out well. All he had learned was but a whet to his appetite. He might as well have known nothing.

And what vexed him most of all was that Finelli had so decidedly beaten him, for he had no doubt that the Italian had somehow overheard the whole scheme.

"I'll git even with that Dago yit, or I'll bu'st," ejaculated the disappointed boy. "Tain't



"I'm fer no imported furriner to git his work ahead of a true blue American born. I bet high I'll discount him yit."

## CHAPTER VI.

## THE BOOTBLACK'S REPORT.

"D'ye know what I think 'bout Fin?" queried Harry of Wallace, the policeman, the next mornin'.

"Fin?—Who's Fin?"

"Why, that Dago. That Etalyan sharp."

"Finelli you mean?"

"I don't keer what's the tail of his name. Fin's 'nough fur me. D'ye know what I think o' him?"

"No."

"Well, he's a daisy—a reg'lar butterfly, Fin is! Sharp?—you bet? You could shave yerself with him and not leave a hair. I'm dead gone on Fin."

"What makes you think him so sharp?"

"Did ye ever see one o' them devil's darnin'-needles?"

"Yes."

"Well, Fin's one o' them. He don't think no more o' goin' through a keyhole than you would o' waltzin' through a barn door. You kin drop him down anywhere, an' when you go ter lay yer hand on him he won't be there."

"What do you mean? What has Fin been doing?"

Harry now told his late adventure, much to the surprise of the policeman.

"You're not a bad detective yourself," he remarked. "As for Finelli, I knew he was a keen one. No doubt he was hidden somewhere in that house and overheard the conversation you report. But for fear he did not, you had better tell it to Mr. Wilson. Your discovery of Fisk is important. And what you tell me of Mr. Wilson's visitor may be more important."

"You think he won't kick me out if I go there?"

"Not he. News are always welcome."

"Then here goes."

With Harry to decide was to act. He made his way without delay to the banker's establishment, and with little difficulty obtained admittance to the private office. The clerks were now beginning to look upon him as a privileged visitor.

Mr. Wilson looked up at his entrance.

"Well, boy, what is it?" he asked shortly.

"Seen Fin this mornin'?"

"Yes."

"Well, what's he got to say for himself?"

"Do you think that is any of your business?"

"You bet it is! I ain't been snoozin', Mr. Wilson. I've jist been down a gold mine since you see'd me. You had an oldish chap come here twice yesterday?"

"Yes," answered the banker quickly. "What do you know about that? What of him?"

"I know somethin' 'bout him that's worth money. He's been collougin' with Bill Fisk. And he's sold a railroad ticket that maybe you guv him, an' is transmogrifyin' the price of it inter whisky as fast as fun."

"Mr. Wilson turned very pale at this news. It meant far more to him than the speaker dreamed of. He rested his hands on the arms of his chair for support, and looked up with a haggard face."

"What have you found out? Tell me the whole of it."

"My news is worth money, Mr. Wilson. And more than a ten center, too."

"I will pay you what it is worth. Now what is it?"

"My question comes in fu'st; I axed you what Fin reported. Has he guv that black-mail money?"

"Yes."

"To Bill Fisk?"

"No. Fisk sent an agent to receive it. The detective followed the agent."

"And holed him?"

"No. The fellow was too sharp."

"Broke the trail, did he?"

"He did. Fisk has so far been too sharp-witted for Finelli."

"Does Fin say that?"

"Yes."

"That he ain't seen Bill Fisk?"

"Exactly."

Harry sat back on his chair and whistled.

"What is the matter, boy?"

"D'yer want to know what I think o' Fin?"

"I presume I'm bound to know."

"He's a sundowner, Fin is. A regular mountain daisy. My eyes, ain't he a sockdologer?"

"Come, come, boy; what kind of language is this? What about Finelli?"

"He knows all 'bout Bill Fisk, that's what."

He's playin' it on you, Mr. Wilson. He's tryin' to make a big job o' this an' squeeze you hard. Wants to git you up to high pay pitch, then he'll flop down on Fisk and rake in the plunder—he's a keen un, Fin is."

Mr. Wilson looked reflectively at the boy. He seemed decidedly in earnest. And he appeared to know what he was talking about.

"What do you know about him?" he at length asked. "You have learned something?"

"Lots. Got a whole bag-full. Square yourself and I'll let it out."

The banker sat back in his chair prepared to listen. His face was greatly disturbed. What he had already heard was not reassuring.

"Go on," he said briefly.

Harry proceeded to tell the story of his preceding day's adventures, to which Mr. Wilson listened with the most intense interest. It meant much to him; far more than the boy imagined.

The story of the conversation between the confederates particularly excited him.

"It is as I feared," he said. "This Fisk knew the value of the paper. And so they are going to squeeze me for fifty thousand dollars—I fancy I will not bleed as easy as they think. Go on. What followed?"

Harry proceeded with his story, his auditor again becoming absorbed in hearing of the strange appearance of Finelli from the house.

"He said not one word of this."

"That ain't his lay," rejoined the boy confidently. "Fin's a good deal like a sponge. He sucks up more than he lets out. He's savin' up fur the big stakes."

"Have you told him of your discovery?"

"Nary tell. I ain't that sort. I'm layin' out fer a detective, and I'm goin' ter foller Fin. He knows the biz."

"He is right in keeping his secrets, but he should have told me. Go on with your story."

Harry, thus desired, completed his tale, ending with his tracking of George Wilson to the whisky-mill.

"The dissolute wretch!" hissed Mr. Wilson spitefully. "He was always a disgrace to all connected with him."

"He's a heavy hand at the whisky bottle," informed Harry.

"If he would only kill himself with it!"

"Tain't so bad," continued the boy. "A full head makes a loose tongue. It's my notion I'd best foller him up, catch him drunk ag'in, and chin to him when his brains is floatin' round permiscuous."

"Chin to him? What do you mean?"

"Pump him! Git him talkin' 'bout this biz, and rake in what's he's up to."

Mr. Wilson shook his head doubtfully.

"It won't work, I fear. He is too old a hand at the bottle."

"I might try."

"It will be well to keep on his track, at any rate. Finelli is evidently trailing him, but it is clear that you have the detective instinct. You have learned some things of great value. Keep up your quest, my boy. I will pay you for your work."

"That's talk. How much?"

"Two dollars a day, and an extra for every bit of important news you bring."

"Pass over your flipper! I'm yer boss," declared the boy, ardently.

He caught hold of Mr. Wilson's somewhat reluctant "flipper" and shook it with a will.

"Yer don't mind my doin' a job o' shinin' between times?"

"No."

"Then good-by. I'm on that. And I'm goin' fur the extrys too, you bet."

Harry left the banker's office, as much elated at heart as if his fortune had been made, while he hurried home to tell his mother of his good luck. Mr. Wilson sat back in his chair with a look as if twenty years had been added to his age. He hoped for the best, but feared the worst. Dark clouds seemed gathering over his pathway.

Harry went ardently to work at his new vocation, but with no promising success. For two days he hung round the vicinity of the mansion in which he had had his recent adventure, but no trace of Fisk or Wilson was to be seen. They appeared to have deserted that locality.

The young detective was a little nonplused at this. The task was not going to be so easy as one as he had hoped. As he lay in bed the next morning, before rising to his daily labor, a luminous idea came to him.

"Track Finelli! That's my go! He's on their trail. I'll git on his! Fin's playin' shady with the old man. Schemin' to bleed him heavy, he is. I'm goin' fur that Dago, sure pop."

He soon found it was not so easy to play this game on the Italian as he had thought. Finelli appeared to be too old a hand at the business for a youngster to get the best of him. He seemed instinctively to feel that he was being followed, and day after day threw the boy from his track.

The thing was getting monotonous. Harry got his blood up, and determined to run down the detective or spoil in the effort.

The next day he got on his track again and followed him persistently. It was no light task. Finelli seemed dashing over New York without a purpose in view. Now he would run at full speed up the stairs of an Elevated Station, and dash into a passing train. Now he would hail a cab and drive at speed for several miles across town. Now he would dart into a drinking-saloon, and pass through it to another street in the rear.

His motions were those of one who is flying from pursuit, and it needed all the tact and agility of the boy to keep on his track. He did so, however, and at the end of three hours of this game of hide and seek Harry still had him in view.

They were passing along a quiet street, Finelli walking along in front with no indication that he had anything on his mind, the boy twenty paces in his rear, alert in his motions, and ready to spring into a sheltering doorway if his quarry should turn.

After proceeding some distance Finelli turned sharply into a crossing street, and disappeared from view.

Harry hurried to the corner, fearing this was a ruse on the part of the detective. He was sure so on turning the corner, for no trace of Finelli was visible. He had disappeared.

"Dash it all! has he flung me?" cried the boy. "Where's he slid to?"

"Here!" came a voice at his elbow. At the same moment a hand caught him firmly by the arm.

Harry turned to see the Italian gazing upon him with satirical eyes. He had been hidden in a depression of the corner building.

"So, young man, how do you like running down a detective, eh?"

"By golly, but ye're a sundowner!" was all that Harry could say.

Finelli laughed.

"You've tried it on three days now, youngster. To-day you have done well. Very well."

Harry felt like swearing.

"Ye don't mean ter say as ye've been playin' with me?"

"Trying your mettle, youngster. Now seet down. Tell me what you want."

"Want to see where ye're goin'."

"For what you want to see that?"

"Tell yer why. Old moneybags axed me ter hunt up Bill Fisk. I tried that on and got flung. Then I thought I'd bunt you up, 'cause I believe you know where Bill Fisk is."

The detective laughed knowingly.

"I know? How should I know?"

"'Cause ye're as sharp as a steel-trap, and as cute as three foxes, that's why. I've been watchin' you, Fin, and I know you ain't no slouch. You know where Bill Fisk is, sure as shootin'."

The officer continued to laugh in the same knowing fashion.

"You don't?"

"Nary know. He's flung me."

"Well, boy; you've got the making of a detective in you, I see that. If Mr. Weelson wants you to help me, very well. Come to my office to-morrow morning, and I'll tell you a thing or two. I'll put you at work."

"You will?"

"Yes."

"Jolly papers! I'm yer boss."

"Now leave me for to-day. I have work on hand that you would only spoil."

Thus admonished Harry dutifully obeyed. Finelli went on his errand unwatched.

His work did not seem very successful, for that night an event occurred that startled all New York the next morning, and which indicated that in this case the villains had quite got the best of the true men and the detectives.

## CHAPTER VII.

## TRAILING THE BRIGANDS.

THE sensation referred to at the close of the last chapter was a startling one. The papers of the next morning had in them this item of news:

## "MYSTERIOUS CRIME!"

## "ABDUCTION OF A WEALTHY BANKER!"

"The well-known stock-broker and banker, Harvey Wilson, whose bold operations on Wall street have



excited much comment, was mysteriously abducted last night. All that is known of the affair is that a stranger called at his mansion on Fifth avenue about nine o'clock in the evening, and that the two left the house together.

"A half-hour afterward the attention of officer Jones was called to a struggle between several men, a cry for help, and the thrusting of one of them into a carriage, which immediately drove off at full speed.

"The officer pursued, sounding an alarm as he did so. But the speed of the horses soon distanced him, and the villainous attempt was completely successful.

"At the locality of the struggle there was found a hat which has been recognized as that of Harvey Wilson, so that there is no doubt that he has been abducted. The purpose of the crime can only be conjectured. It may be intended to hold the unfortunate prisoner for ransom.

"This event is almost without precedent in our city. Brigands seem to be infesting the streets of New York. An earnest effort will need to be made to capture these villains and break up what may be a dangerous gang. Detectives are already on the track of the mysterious carriage, and success in tracing it is hoped for. Few such dastardly crimes as this escape the vigilance of our active, vigilant, and skillful detective force."

"Taffy!" exclaimed Harry in disgust, on hearing the startling news. "Heerd o' sich things afore. The perlice is allers on the track, but somehow they never git there. Fin's the lad fur this job. He'll smell it out if anybody kin. And I'm goin' to help Fin."

The detective had promised to put him to work this day, and here was work cut out. Harry lost no time in seeking Finelli.

"You've heern tell of it, I s'pose?"

"Yes."

"The sky's come down in the night."

"A leetle piece of it."

"Who's done this?"

"Some rascal."

"Think so, Fin? Mebbe 'twas some preacher."

The detective laughed.

"Ye're jist so close-mouthed as an eyster," continued Harry, disgustedly. "You know jist as well as you're settin' there, it was Bill Fisk and that other snoozer that done it."

"What other snoozer?"

"You bloomin' innocent! I'd giv you a ban- nauer, if I had one. You take the cake, you do."

"Oh, you mean the man that veesits Mr. Weelson?"

"That's 'bout the heft of it."

"You are no fool, youngster. Come, I am on my way to Mr. Weelson's mansion. You may go with me if you will."

Nothing could have suited Harry better. The abduction had roused all the detective instinct in him, and he was bent on taking a hand in the search.

There proved to be little to do at the house. Only one of the servants had seen Mr. Wilson's visitor, and he could not give a very clear description of him. The size and shape of the man might have suited George Wilson, but it was too vaguely stated to be of much use.

"Where did this interview take place?"

"Here; in the parlor."

"Did Mr. Wilson go out from here, or did he return to his room?"

"He went first to his room, where he stayed about five minutes. They then went out together."

"Show me his room."

The servant did so. Finelli looked round the apartment with an observant eye, his spectacles seeming to peer into every nook and corner of it.

A desk stood open at one side of the room. In front of this was a chair which looked as if it had been recently used, and pushed back in rising.

Some papers lay scattered on the desk. The pigeon-holes were filled with others, neatly arranged. Thrust into one of these holes was a check-book, that stood an inch or two out.

All this Finelli took in at a glance. He opened and ran his eye over the scattered papers. The check-book attracted his attention, and he looked on the stub for the date and amount of the last check.

"No guide here," he said, flinging it down again.

"How was Mr. Weelson dressed?" he asked the servant. "Did he change his clothes before going out?"

"He was dressed in black. All he did was to change his dressing sack for his coat."

Finelli asked other questions, though without gaining any useful information. While he was doing so Harry curiously picked up the check-book and looked at the stub. He did not understand it, but he saw the date of the day be-

fore, and figures indicating one hundred dollars. There was a name, too, but that he couldn't read. He shut the book again.

"Fin knows," he said to himself. "I'd been fool enough to think the old man 'd been seen fur a cool hundred. But Fin knows."

"Come," said the detective, having completed his examination of the servant.

Harry followed obediently, looking on the officer as he did so with an air of deep admiration. His opinion of the detective skill of Finelli was growing. The quickness of action and secrecy of purpose of the detective impressed him deeply.

"He knows, Fin does," the boy repeated to himself. "He's a sundowner, Fin is."

The detective's next visit was to the officer who had seen the struggle and abduction. Him he questioned keenly as to all the particulars of the affair, the number and appearance of the men, the size and shape of the carriage, the direction taken, how far he had followed, and various other questions.

"What was the character of the cry you heard?"

"Help! help! That was all."

"There was no outcry afterwards?"

"None."

"Could he have been stunned? Did you see any blow given; or hear any sound like a blow?"

"No. None I could be sure of. There was an active hustling. 'It was all over in a minute. I started to run as soon as I heard the cry, but the carriage drove off before I made twenty steps."

"Old hands, evidently. Up to their game. The plot had been fully laid, and was carried out skillfully."

"It seems so."

"Are there reports in from other members of the force?"

"That I don't know."

"I must find out."

Finelli's next move was to Police Headquarters. Here an examination of the reports brought out the fact that a closed carriage, driven rapidly, had been observed by several officers. Its course had been toward the Jersey City ferry, and ferry reports indicated that such a carriage had crossed about 10:30 P. M.

Nothing peculiar had been noticed about it. No sound had issued from it. The driver was a slim, tall man, to whom no attention had been paid.

"To Jersey City next," said the officer to Harry, who had accompanied him in this round.

"So far we are on the track."

"Think you'll run 'em down, Fin?" asked Harry.

"There, boy, you have me. It seems easy enough so far. But we are following old hands. I am afraid of the sands of New Jersey."

Harry looked questioning into his face.

"Think they'll get planted there?"

"Too deep for us, perhaps."

"They'll come up watermelons, I reckon."

"You're a wit, youngster," laughed the officer.

"Reckon I ain't got no wit to spare," rejoined Harry, with a smile at the compliment.

Jersey City, as the officer had feared, did not pan out well. Little trace of the carriage could be found after leaving the ferry. One officer had seen a closed carriage, at eleven o'clock, running in the direction of the road to Newark, but this was the last bit of information to be had. If this was the vehicle sought for, it had vanished from that point.

"Now, my lad, do you know what I brought you here for?"

"For company, I reckon," rejoined Harry.

"Hardly. You are a keen scout, youngster. You have chased me half a week round New York. Now I will give you something more profitable. We have followed that carriage to this point. You can follow up the trail."

"Ain't you goin' to?" asked Harry.

"Not now. I have other matters to attend to. I must go back to New York. You have learned something of our ways. You try what you can do."

"Dunno how I'm goin' ter git my two dollars a day if I don't."

"What two dollars?"

"Maybe ye don't know. Fin, that old money-bags, hired me fer a detective, and he's to giv me two dollars a day. Who's goin' to pay me if I don't find him? Got ter dig him up."

"Ha, ha!" laughed the detective. "That's what ails you, is it? Go on, then. You have a chance to earn your money."

"He was to pay me higher for extrys."

"Find that carriage. That will be a big

extra," laughed Finelli. "Good-by, now. port to me when you've done."

He walked away. Harry looked after him in some surprise, that his Italian accent did not seem nearly so strong as it had been.

"That comes of keepin' good American company," he said to himself. "Fin's gettin civilized."

The boy was not a little proud of the task assigned him. The two dollars a day was with him a minor matter. To be put on duty of this kind, made the trusted agent of a skilled detective, seemed to him a position brimful of glory. He was bound to turn in a good report.

At times, indeed, there came across his mind the fear that the Italian might be making game of him. He had laughed now and then in a way that seemed significant to the boy.

"But he's tracked the carriage that took away old Wilson; there ain't no two ways 'bout that. That's straight as a gun-barrel. And I'm to keep on trackin' it. Reckon ther' ain't many things straighter than that."

The young scout put himself with vim at the work assigned him. It quickly seemed, too, as if he had picked up the trail that Finelli had lost. Everybody he met, man, woman, and child, was questioned about the carriage, and before long he met a person who had seen such a carriage, about eleven o'clock the night before, running swiftly out toward Newark.

This trail he did not lose. Step by step he followed it. Some had heard the sound of wheels; others had heard dogs barking and a driver swearing; another had heard the crack of a whip. Mile after mile he followed the trail, which soon turned toward the suburbs of Jersey City, and approaching the Hudson again.

It was seven o'clock that evening when his task ended. He seemed to have run down his game. The carriage he had been following had been seen to turn into the yard of Howard Thompson, a beef butcher of that locality.

There it stood now—a shabby and dilapidated affair, but still a closed carriage. Harry now got very sly in his questions. Fortunately he found an employee of the butcher who was willing to talk.

"Mr. Thompson—yes, he came home late last night. I see him come in."

"He brought something with him?"

"Yes."

"What was it?" asked Harry, quivering with expectation.

"What was it? Why, a bull calf.—What you want to know for, hey?"

Harry wanted to know no more. And the exclamation that broke from his lips was more forcible than polite. He had been badly sold, and had walked for miles on the trail of a bull calf.

## CHAPTER VIII.

### A SHINE FOR AN OLD PARD.

If ever there was a disgusted boy it was Harry Hale. To pursue an abducted Wall street banker for a whole day, and find at the end of his trail "a bull calf!" It was enough to make a saint swear.

The thought, indeed, came to him that perhaps this was a ruse, to throw him from the track. But further investigation satisfied him that his informant told the simple truth. He even saw that identical "bull calf." A sturdy little chap he was, that looked as if he might grow to be boss of a ten-acre field; but as little like a Wall street banker as could well be imagined.

Harry turned away with odd thoughts in his mind.

"Tim's playin' it on me," he said to himself. "Biz'ness in New York? I don't take no stock in that. He knowed it was a blind lead, blame him; and he set me adrift to git sold. Not much he'd left the trail if ther'd been anything in it."

He walked on, fuming and fretting.

"I bet high he don't sell me ag'in. I'm goin' to run this circus myself. And won't I crow over him if I nail old Moneybags 'fore he does!"

This hope was enough for the sanguine boy to dream upon for that night. But he rose the next morning downhearted and disconsolate. How was he to get on the track of these villains? They had left their old haunts. The carriage trail had vanished. What was he to do? Unless he should run across them by accident, all hope seemed lost.

Harry quietly resolved to go back to the practice of his profession. What troubled him most was the belief that he had been sold by Finelli. He felt that he would be willing to give his best toe to get even with the sharp Italian detective.



"Two dollars a day!" said his mother shrewishly to him that morning. "Where are your two dollars?"

"The bank's busted, and the cashier's vamped to Canada," replied the boy. "Got to wait till they fetch him back."

"None of your slack," she retorted. "You go to work and bring in some money, or I'll make things lively for you. We can't live on the wind."

"Ain't I got my box on?" rejoined Harry, pettishly. "I've giv' up detectin', and I'm goin' to shinin'. An' don't you be 'feared 'bout them two dollars a day. Old Moneybags 'll turn up and fork over yet. Mind I say so."

He got hastily out, not caring to keep up this conversation, which might end in the argument of the broomstick if he provoked the testy matron too much. Harry, for certain reasons of his own, had said nothing to his mother about the fifty dollars' reward.

The day proved not a bad one for business. It seemed to Harry that everybody he met wanted a shine. By nightfall his pocket was well lined with nickels, while he was tired enough for a long night's rest. His week of detective work had spoiled him for the regular practice of his profession.

"I'll take a shine, I judge," spoke a youthful voice above him, as Harry was replacing the brushes in his box from the last job.

"H'ist up yer continuations, then," he said, without looking up at his customer. He was more interested just then in feet than faces.

"I want a prime A1 polish, mind," remarked the customer, as Harry began his task. "None o' yer nickel rubs. This shine's good for a dime."

"All correct!" rejoined Harry. "I'll make lookin' glasses o' yer shoes. If you squint inter them when I'm done you'll think yer head's took the place of yer heels."

The customer laughed, and puffed away at the cigarette he was smoking, while Harry rubbed diligently at his very rusty pair of foot-gear.

Not till he had finished did he look up. He saw first a well frayed pair of coarse trousers, whose stuff seemed familiar to him, then a short, sailor jacket, and finally a face that made him jump to his feet with an angry exclamation.

"Jake Brown!" he ejaculated. "By the blazin' bullfrog ye're playin' it on me, are ye? Gettin' me ter shine yer dirty clay-kickers? Square yerself, Jake, fur I'm goin' to polish you off all over."

This was more of a shine than Jake seemed to fancy.

"I guess my money's as good as anybody's," he hastily rejoined. "Here's yer dime. Old Vanderbilt wouldn't giv' you more."

"He wouldn't giv' me a pair o' bog-trotters like them to shine. Tell yer what it is, Jake; ye're a good deal too fresh, and I'm a-goin' to salt you."

"Dry up," cried Jake impatiently. "I'll giv' you a shine if you want to square the jobs.—And I'm out o' that business, too," he rejoined, with a whiff at his cigarette.

"Ye're out of it?" queried Harry curiously. "What yer doin' now, Jake? Seems to me ye're puttin' on style."

"I'm a jolly sailor lad," answered Jake, with an affected nautical air. "Told ye I was goin' aboard a fishin'-smack. I'm full sailor there now; hand 'fore the mast. And it's jist gay fun. You oughter peg in, Harry. It's time you was lookin' fur somethin' higher than shinin'."

This was said with an air of infinite superiority that would have been amusing to an on-looker; but it riled Harry.

"Somethin' higher!" he ejaculated. "When I git climbin' I won't stop at bait-digger fur a porgy fishin'-boat. That ain't my idee of git-tin' up in the world. I've got my job laid out, and I wouldn't trade with you fur big boot."

"What yer goin' to be?" asked Jake curiously.

"That's tellin's. But it's 'way up. Bait-diggin' ain't no patch to it."

"Oh! you dry up on the bait-diggin'! We don't do our fishin' with worms.—Say, old pard, how did that job turn out 'bout the old feller's pocketbook? You was goin' snacks with me on that; and all the snacks I got was a lickin'."

"'Cause you hooked my box," retorted Harry. "I didn't say snacks, nother. If I did, I on'y got a ten-center, which I flung back to him."

"I seen him since," said Jake, in a tone that attracted Harry's attention.

"When?" he asked, quickly.

"Night 'fore last."

"Oh, come, now, Jake; ye're givin' me cold 'taters."

"It mought'n't been him, but it looked like him, anyway."

Harry was burning with interest. Was the lost trail about to open again? If Jake had really seen Mr. Wilson, and at the time named, it meant something important.

"When did ye see him?" he asked.

"That's tellin's. Can't giv' it away. It's a queer go all through."

"Ther' was somethin' crooked 'bout it, wasn't there, Jake?"

"Ye wanter know too much. When I axed you 'bout yer bizness, you shet me up. I ain't opened out since."

"Tell yer what," rejoined Harry, confidently. "I don't mind tellin' you, bein's you're an old pard. I'm goin' ter be a detective."

"You?—Oh, come, now, dish that!"

"It's true. What's more, there's somethin' crooked 'bout this old snoozer, and I'm on it. Put me on his track, Jake, and I'll go snacks this time, sure."

"Square? No artful dodges? Won't lick me an' call it snacks, like you did afore?"

"Nary lick, if you don't steal my box."

"Tell yer what, Harry, I've 'most a mind to leak. Got ter think it over a bit, though. Say, pard, don't you want to take a cruise on the Lively Nelly? She's goin' out fur a short trip to-morrow mornin'. Come aboard, and I'll tell you all I know 'bout the old chap. It's mighty cur'us. The Lively Nelly catches other things besides fish."

As may be imagined, Harry was not slow in accepting this invitation. Jake's manner, even more than his words, indicated that he had something mysterious to tell, and the young detective began to feel himself already on the track of his game. Learning where the Lively Nelly was docked, he faithfully promised Jake to be on hand bright and early the next morning.

He tried again, it is true, to learn Jake's story then and there; but the young fisherman was obstinate, and would agree to tell it only in his own time and way.

With this understanding the pair of confederates parted, lone the less friends from the fact that their last meeting had been a hostile one.

Jake strolled away with an affected sailor swagger that made his companion laugh.

"Ye're catchin' it, Jake," he called after him. "You'll git the hitch arter you've been out two or three years more."

He walked away toward home, though the fates had decided that he should not reach that haven for hours to come, and that important events should happen in the interval.

For to his surprise, as he walked carelessly onward, he saw before him the form of Finelli, the detective.

The pace of the latter was not a lounging one. It was that of a man who meant business. A moment's thought decided Harry. He disposed of his box in a safe place and put himself on the track of the detective.

"He's bamboozled me, Fin has. Let's see if he'll do it ag'in. If he's on this job, I'm on him."

Remembering his former experience in tracking the acute Italian, Harry was doubly careful now. Finelli, however, seemed to have no thought of pursuit, but made his way directly to an "Elevated" station, where he took an uptown train. The young scout managed to board the same train without being observed. A fortunate rush of passengers enabled him to gain a car unseen by the detective.

A look around showed him that he was in the same car with Finelli, who, however, had his back to him. The boy leaned back as if asleep, pulled his hat down over his face, and took other steps of concealment, in case the sharp eyes in front should turn in his direction.

But Finelli seemed devoid of suspicion. At every station Harry opened his half-closed eyes, but the detective sat impassive. Only when the train reached its final station at Harlem did he move. He now rose and quickly left the car.

Harry followed more deliberately. Luck had favored him so far. He did not wish to spoil his chances by impatience.

When he reached the platform Finelli had descended to the street. He followed. There was the Italian, a hundred yards distant, walking rapidly away.

"If I ain't got Fin by the flipper this time there's no use talkin'!" said the delighted young scout. "He laid me out in Jersey City. See if I don't lay him out here."

Former experience, however, made the boy cautious. He kept far in the rear, barely keeping Finelli within the range of vision. This was easy to do here, there being few persons about.

The detective made his way northward, and

finally stopped before a house on the outskirts of Harlem. He turned and looked behind him now for the first time, but Harry was safely hidden behind a big tree that adorned the sidewalk.

And now an event happened that filled the pursuer with surprise. A man stepped from the house and shook hands with the detective, the sight of whom gave Harry a start.

It was the form and build of Mr. Wilson's visitor, the man whom Finelli had formerly pursued. He turned his face so that Harry got a glimpse of it. It was undoubtedly the same man.

After a minute's talk the two entered the house. Harry was taken aback. What did this mean? Finelli hand and glove with this man, who very probably had something to do with the abduction! Was he also conspiring with Bill Fisk? Was he, while professing to play the detective, himself leagued with the abductors?

Such were the thoughts that passed through the boy's mind as he moved cautiously toward the house. He wished to locate it, and get a better idea of its character.

The locality was the dividing line between city and country. The house stood alone, though others were scattered here and there. It was a small, three-story brick building, suited to a small family, and people of moderate means.

Night was rapidly coming on as Harry found a good lookout place behind a large log that lay in the open field opposite the house in question. It was a log of irregular shape, one end being lifted so that the boy could see under it while stretched at full length on the ground.

Here he lay for nearly an hour, his eyes fixed unmovingly on the house, waiting for developments. The development came in an unexpected form.

The sun had gone down, the light was rapidly fading out, only a faint gleam remained in the west, when the door opened and a man looked out, at sight of whom Harry almost gave a shout of surprise and triumph.

The face he looked on was that of Bill Fisk!

#### CHAPTER IX. THE TRAIL OPENS.

THAT it was Bill Fisk on whom he looked, the concealed scout was very sure. Night was approaching, but there was abundant light yet to make out his face at that distance.

After standing a minute, looking around him, Fisk moved away. What should he do—follow him, or remain to watch the house?

Before Harry could settle this query in his mind it was settled for him. The man he was watching stopped at a lamp-post letter box, deposited a letter, and turned back toward the house. He re-entered and closed the door.

"Who'd ever thought that Fin was that sort?" said the boy to himself. "Him collougin' with them coons! My eyes isn't it funny! They've run the old man off betwixt 'em, and Fin's in it on shares."

As he continued to look, a light appeared in the second-story front windows, and the form of a man was seen moving past them.

"Havin' a confab, they are," considered the watcher. "Layin' the'r plans fur a squeeze. Fin's run 'em down and they've roped him in; that's 'bout the size of it. He's a nice detective, he is! playin' fur snacks with the kidnappers! I'm goin' to try hard to git even with Fin."

As these thoughts passed through his mind he continued his observations, but without seeing anything further.

"If they've got the old man holed in that shanty it's an easy job," was the next thought that passed through his mind. "I could run the police on it easy as lightnin' and scoop him in. But I ain't the coon to giv' no false alarm. Got to look 'fore I leap."

What was going on within the house? How was he to find out? Those questions followed each other through his mind.

He left his lurking-place and approached the building, observing it closely. The light still shone from the second-floor window, which was opened to the evening air, but on the first floor all was darkness.

He tried listening. There was a murmuring sound above, as if talking was going on, but no words were distinguishable. Nor was there any means on the outside of getting nearer the lighted window.

Was it safe to venture inside? With his usual impulsiveness Harry tried the door. It resisted his hand. It was locked.

"Well, that's settled anyhow," he said to himself. "They ain't takin' no chances."

The house, as we have said, stood alone. Grounds surrounded it on both sides, inclosed by a picket fence. An open gate gave easy



passage through this. Harry entered, with the purpose of exploring the rear of the building.

There were a number of windows on the first floor, but the shutters were all closed and locked. Reaching the back door he tried this, and found it also tightly fastened. The whole house seemed to be a case of "no admittance."

"Looks as if ther' was di'monds in the box," he considered. "What 'd they lock it up so tight fur if ther' wasn't nothin' wu'th stealin'?"

The more he found himself shut out of the house, the more anxious Harry grew to enter it. But how was he to do this? That was not clear.

There was no shed at the back door, by which an active lad might have climbed to the second floor windows. No trace of a ladder was visible. He walked round and round like a tiger at bay, seeing no way to gain his ends.

This quest finally ended in a return to the front, with the hope that the speakers might have raised their voices.

They were talking louder, it is true. Occasionally something was said in quite loud tones, as if there was an approach to a quarrel. Now and then a word or two could be distinguished. But though Harry listened intently for nearly an hour he heard nothing that had any important meaning.

The boy was decidedly disappointed. He had found a nest of conspirators, but there seemed to be no eggs in it for him. He saw nothing better to do than to return to the city, report his find, and have the place searched by the police.

Before giving up the quest he took another round of the house, with a hope of better luck. It was useless. No means of entrance could be found.

Returning, he was about to step out front, when the sound of an opening door made him pause. He crouched down by the side of the house, and awaited developments.

It was the front door he had heard. Steps now were audible on the pavement. They stopped and voices were heard.

"To-morrow they'll get the letter."

It seemed the voice of Bill Fisk that spoke.

"The next day we may look for the answer. Finelli will bring it."

He laughed, as if much amused.

"That's a mighty rich go, Georgy, eh?"

"Tain't so bad," answered the voice of George Wilson. "Somehow, though, I think he'd bleed better the other way."

"It isn't certain. It might take a big lawsuit, and who's got the needful? A quick squeeze like this suits my ideas best. You can try t'other afterwards, if you like."

"I guess this 'll fetch enough to drown me in whisky," growled the other.

"What's to be done with him, that's the question," rejoined Fisk. "If we had him here it'd be nearer town."

"Tain't safe goods to move," replied Wilson. "Best leave well enough alone. There's no good holdin' places in this house, like there are in t'other."

Some further words of minor importance were spoken. Then Harry heard steps moving toward him. He crouched lower, while his eyes were keenly on the alert.

The darkness was thickening, but the light at the window threw a faint gleam below. The crouching boy was able to distinguish the passing form.

To his surprise, the form he perceived was that of Finelli. There were the dark skin and spectacles of the Italian. Harry had been wondering what had become of him, for only Fisk and Wilson had spoken. Had he stood listening to their talk without a word, and then walked silently away?

The case seemed curious.

He listened for more words between Fisk and Wilson, but nothing was said. After a minute the door closed again, and all became silent.

Harry remained in a quandary. What to make of all this he could not decide. It was strange that Finelli had not spoken a word during that conversation, and that Fisk and Wilson, who had talked so glibly before, now entered the house in silence.

Harry listened again under the lighted window. All was still. Conversation seemed over for the night. He tried the door again. It was locked.

The young scout walked slowly away. Of one thing he felt sure. The prisoner was not in that house. That had been decidedly stated. Where was he?

Just then he could think of but one way to find out. If this was the domicile of the kidnappers they could be watched and followed.

That, however, was a matter for the next day. Just now the thing to do was to go home for a night's sleep. And the next morning he had an appointment with Jake Brown for a sail in the fishing-smack.

Jake had something important to tell. He must have his say. The trail of the kidnappers could wait until his story was told.

Harry slept soundly that night. He had done some good detective work, and his conscience was easy. He felt sure that he was on the track of the strange event of which the papers were still full. The mystery of the abduction seemed in his hands.

But there was another thread to the trail, and this Jake Brown held. His story was next in order.

Harry was on time the next morning at the dock of the Lively Nelly. She proved to be a not very clean and tidy Nelly, and a little of the water that swirled below her might have been usefully employed on her decks.

Harry looked over her with a critical eye. She was sloop-rigged, and of a long, slender shape, with narrow cutwater. The Lively Nelly looked as if she might be light of heel.

"Hallo, Harry!" cried Jake, who just then appeared from the hold. "Jump aboard. We'll cast off in ten minutes."

"Is this the boy you talked about?" asked a scowling-looking fellow near the bow.

"Yes."

"Well, he can have a trip if he keeps himself out of the way, and if he takes a hand at the lines."

Harry waited for no second invitation. He jumped to the deck, shook hands with Jake, and at once began an inspection of the vessel under the guidance of his friend, whose knowledge of fishing-sloops was enormous, considering that it was but a week or so old.

Jake was overflowing with nautical terms, and had the slang of the salt water already at his tongue's end. Long before he got through introducing Harry to the Lively Nelly, the said Nelly was in full flight up the East River, with a broad show of sail and a stiff breeze.

At the end of a half hour the two boys seated themselves on a coil of rope near the mast, the inspection of the Lively Nelly having been completed.

From where they sat they had a good view of the New York side of the stream. They were now running past the upper portion of the city, the thickly-clustered houses beginning to show open spaces, which would soon broaden into green fields.

The talk that followed was long and confidential. Jake had, just now, no duties to perform, and was quite free to do the honors to his friend.

"It's jist as I said, pard," he mysteriously remarked, "the lively Nelly carries more nor fish. You won't split on a feller?"

"Nary split. You know me, Jake."

"And you'll go snacks?"

"If you put me on the track I want I'm good for fifty dollars."

"Oh, come now! You're swellin'."

"Not much. I'm in on it."

"It's jist 'bout this shape, Harry," said Jake, his voice falling almost to a whisper, while he looked carefully round to see if there was any one near. "We shipped some live stock aboard Wednesday night that wasn't pulled out o' salt water."

"Live stock?"

"Human live stock. It was 'bout half-past ten or thereaway. I was 'snoozin' in this very identical coil when a cab drove down to the wharf like to split. It stirred me up wide awake, but I didn't move a peg."

Harry listened in close interest. A carriage? This was growing important.

"I see'd 'em takin' somethin' out of it, and carryin' it down. It was all bunched up in a black cloth. They lowered it aboard and carried it back to the cabin."

"Without a sound?"

"Not a whisper. Mought been a dead log for all the noise it made; but it was 'bout the size of a man. Jist arter that old Snip, our skipper, found me here and kicked me up. He axed what the blazes I was doin' here and told me to git below or he'd guv me a hidin'."

"And you went below?"

"Oh, yes!" with a wink. "I smelt a rat, pard, and was bound ter see it out. So I kept wide awake, with both ears open. 'Long 'bout one o'clock I heard a noise on deck, and managed to git a peep up. There they was, carryin' that bundle ag'in, and lowerin' it into a boat at the sloop's side."

"Who carried it?"

"Two men I never saw before. Old Snip

helped them. When they got it inter the boat these two men jumped in and rowed away."

"I thought you told me you saw that old man."

"So I did. While they was lowerin' it inter the boat the cover come loose and slipped and I see'd a man's face. The ship's light shone right on it. If it wasn't that old fellow you chased 'twasn't nobody."

"Tell you what, Jake, this is prime! What came after?"

"I bunked, that's what. I was afeared of old Snip. When I came to in the mornin' we was back in dock."

"And do you know where this happened?"

"You bet high I do. I took a look ashore, and know the ground like a breeze. Show it to you in 'bout an hour."

"The two men that come in the cab. What was they like?"

Jake described them as well as he could. Their size and shape as described seemed to agree with those of Bill Fisk and George Wilson. Harry began to feel sure that he had now struck a rich trail.

## CHAPTER X.

### A BARGAIN AND A RIDE.

"This is the spot," said Jake Brown, about a half-hour after the date of the conversation recorded.

"Here? Sure of it?" queried Harry, looking out over the swirling waters and the smooth green river borders. "How can you tell? Water don't take no mark, nor green grass nuther."

"You ain't no sailor," rejoined Jake, with infinite contempt. "When you've had my 'specience of salt water you'll know a thing or two."

"Yourn?"—Harry looked into his face, and burst into a loud laugh.—"Oh, come, Jake! wait till you run 'foul o' some softy 'fore you spread."

A shade of haughty disdain for a moment overspread Jake's face; then, with a revulsion of feeling, he, too, burst into a laugh.

"A feller learns fast when he's a-fishin'," he explained. "Anyhow, this is the spot."

"How do you know?"

"It's a way we old salts have," rejoined Jake. "You see them two big trees in a line, back o' the hill there?"

"Yes."

"And the house with the red roof back o' them?"

"I kin shet one eye and see all that."

"Well, them's what I seen that night. There's where they went ashore. An old sailor, you know, jist jumps at them things."

"An old blowhard! Ef you don't dry up I'll pitch you overboard. You make me sick, you do. Ye're 'nough to give the blues to an old goat. Now jist shet yer 'tater trap and let me look round!"

Harry rose and observed the scene keenly, noting all the features of the locality, the various houses scattered here and there, the groves of trees, the character of the Long Island shore, and all the landscapes that were likely to fix the situation in his mind.

"You dunno what house they went to?" he asked.

"No; I was 'feared to keep peepin', fur fear I'd get a settler 'cross the jaw."

"Anyhow you kin swear to what you said!"

"I kin, Harry; on a warehouse full o' Bibles, and me on the roof."

Then if I find the old man ye're good fur a fifty—if I have to sell my box to raise it."

The events of the remainder of that day drove all thoughts of the abduction from Harry's mind. The Lively Nelly ran on till her fishing grounds were reached. Here a considerable freight in oysters and fresh fish, the product of the local fisheries, was taken on board.

The crew of the fishing sloop made some considerable additions to this by the products of their own lines—a sport in which Harry took no small interest.

But the next day's market had to be considered, and the anchor of the Lively Nelly was duly raised, and her sails set, in good time to reach her dock during market business hours.

"So long, Jake," cried Harry, as he sprung ashore. "Had a mighty good sail and a jolly good time, and picked up some scrougin' idears. Tell yer what, if this thing pans out right ye're goin' to finger that fifty."

"How much 'll you git?" queried Jake.

"That 'pends on how they bleed. I'm givin' you a straight tip, and I'm takin' chances. You want to go in on chances?"



"No. I'll take it straight."  
"Guess you'd better. So long. See you soon."

Harry strode away, with his head full of thoughts.

"He thinks a fifty's a big pull. I don't. I've riz in price, you bet. Fin 'd want a five hundred out of this job, and I reckon I'm more use in it than Fin is."

He set his lips grimly as he thought of the peculiar kind of use Fin was.

"A traitor's wuss than a mangy cur," he thought; "and Fin's a traitor from the word go. But you bet yer peepers I've got Fin where the hair's short; and I'll make him squeal 'fore I'm done."

An early hour of the next day found Harry at the office of Harvey Wilson. He was met by the elderly personage with whom he had had the exchange of words on a previous occasion.

"Well?" asked the latter with a smile. He evidently bore no malice.

"Any word o' Mr. Wilson yet?"

"None."

"Ain't on his trail nobow?"

"The affair still continues mysterious. The detective has hopes, it is true; and—"

"Detectives allers has hopes," broke in Harry. "Detectives is born that way. Fin has hopes, I know; but they're cross-grained ones.—But you was goin' ter say somethin' else when I choked you off."

"Perhaps I've said enough. I've no further time to talk to you."

"Who has time? I've got a bag-full o' news 'bout Mr. Wilson. If I'd untie my bag here, I'm 'feared you folks'd open yer eyes so wide it'd take a derrick to shet 'em ag'in. I want to talk to somebody as kin talk biz."

The clerk looked at him curiously.

"What have you learned?" he asked.

"Lots. But 'tain't fur everybody to hear."

"Come this way, boy. It will be well worth your while if you can give us any tidings about Mr. Wilson."

He led the way to the private office.

Harry seated himself in a nonchalant manner. He looked Mr. Johnson, the clerk, knowingly in the face.

"You bet it's got to be wuth my while," he said. "And 'fore I open that there bag I talked about I want ter know how much it's wuth my while."

"Have you really learned anything?"

"Haven't I? Lots, I told you. Now, tell me what you're doin' an' I'll let you inter a thing or two.—You got a letter from the kidnappers yisterday?"

Mr. Johnson, who had heretofore listened to the boy with an incredulous smile, as if he believed him to be merely vamping, started sharply at this remark.

"How do you know that?" he questioned. "It has not been made public."

"That's not a pea to what I know. Tell yer what, I've near away teched bottom in this job."

"By Jove, boy, you are not romancing?"

"I ain't lyin', if that's what ye mean. What was that letter 'bout?"

"It demanded a ransom of fifty thousand dollars for the return of Mr. Wilson."

"Whew! Them coons is steep in their idears. How are you goin' to answer that letter? Won't it put you on their track?"

"They threaten to kill their prisoner if we try any detective game on them."

"They'll do it, too. They're that sort."

"What do you know about them?"

"I know more'n anybody in New York, 'cept themselves. I ain't square on the track of Mr. Wilson, but I'm gittin' there, you bet!"

"It will be a thousand dollars in your pocket if you can put us on his track."

"A thousand?—And ye'd giv the kidnappers fifty thousand?" queried Harry, concealing his delight at this offer.

"I doubt if we'd give them anything."

"You'd give something to discount 'em, and somethin more to nab 'em?"

"I'll tell you what, my boy. We will give three thousand dollars cash to any one who enables us to rescue Mr. Wilson, and as much more for the capture of his kidnappers. There is an offer that's worth working for."

"Now ye're talkin'!" shouted Harry. "Put that down on paper, mister. I'm yer boss on that! And arter old Wilson gits his leg loose I'm goin' to make him pony over as much more."

"How?" asked Mr. Johnson, who was writing.

"That's a little secret 'tween me and the old man. Can't giv it out to nobody but him."

"Well, here is my proposition in writing.

What I offer will be lived up to. Now tell me what you know. Or, stay—let me send first for the detective."

"Send fur Fin? Fur that Etalyan detective? Send fur that Dago? If you do I'll fling up the job! Ain't takin' no Fin in mine! He played a bull-calf game on me, Fin did, and I'm goin' to play a spring-lamb game on him."

"What do you mean, boy? You must talk plain English if you want me to understand you."

"All correck. Here's the size of it."

Harry hereupon began the story of his recent adventures, with one slight but important variation. This was to the effect that it was Bill Fisk that he followed to Harlem, not Finelli. The direct connection of the detective with the kidnappers he preferred, for the present, to keep to himself.

"You won't tell a word of this to Fin?"

"Not a word. I have learned the art of holdin' my tongue."

"I ain't makin' balls fur him to fling. I'm bound to pay him up fur that bull calf. Ther's a perliceman on this beat that's as sharp as a steel-trap, and I'm goin' to take him in."

"What are you going to give him?"

"Reckon 'bout a twenty."

Mr. Johnson laughed.

"You're a born financier," he said. "But the place where the men went ashore; do you think you can find it?"

"If I can't I'll sell out. Tell you what I want you to do."

"What?"

"Play with 'em on that fifty thousand. Let on you bite, but you want time. You've got ter consider. Jist play off and on. Git 'em writin' letters. Make time, that's what I want. Do it mighty sly, though. Don't let 'em see yer little game."

"Trust me to manage that right. And if you rescue Mr. Wilson the money is yours."

"A feller I know is got a tandem bicycle. I'm goin' to nail him fur a ride up the East River. Been out with him before, and kin turn the wheels like fun."

"That's a good idea. Go to-day, if you can. Report to me to-morrow."

"Solid papers. Here goes."

Securing his important document Harry left the office, where Mr. Johnson remained lost in a deep quandary. He could hardly bring himself to believe the boy's story. But how then had he learned about that blackmail letter? and had given evidence of great shrewdness. If he had told the truth the affair was promising.

Mr. Johnson returned to business with the feeling that he had done a good hour's work.

Five o'clock that afternoon found Harry and his bicycling friend rolling along a road leading up the East River, beyond the built-up boundaries of New York.

It was a gentlemanly little fellow that rode with him, far better dressed than our bootblack hero, and the pair seemed ill-assorted to all who saw them. But Will Lindsay had been attracted to Harry by his genial, off-handed manner, and had the wisdom not to look upon poverty as a badge of disgrace. He and Harry were, therefore, fast friends.

Mile after mile they rolled along the smooth, level road. Harry at length became keenly on the alert, watching every point they passed with careful eyes. He recognized that they were near the locality pointed out by Dick.

"What are you about there, Harry?" asked Will, pettishly, as the machine gave a lurch. "You are not attending to your end of the wheel."

"I am goin' to fotch my end of the ship to anchor," answered Harry, pressing heavily on the pedals. "Hold yer level, Will. Ther's somethin' back here I want to squint at."

He sprung from the wheel as he spoke and ran briskly back a hundred paces.

Will, wondering at his action, turned the wheel in the road, and rolled briskly back after him.

On reaching the point where Harry had stopped he found him curiously engaged. He seemed to be intently regarding two trees in the distance, with his hand up to his eyes, as if lining them. Then he turned and gazed at a red-roofed house a little to the north.

"What's up, Harry?"

Without answering the boy looked from point to point about him, finally turning his gaze across the East River to the distant Long Island shore. A minute of this sufficed. He slapped his knee ardently, and exclaimed:

"Nailed, by Jumbo! Hit the bull's-eye square center! I'm bound to finger them there spondulicks."

"What's the matter, Harry? Are you going crazy?"

Now for the first time Harry turned his attention to his companion.

"Nary crazy," he said. "Sound as the goose, you bet. Hop off that machine, Will, and climb up here on the fence. I've got somethin' pretty to tell you. You kin keep a secret?"

"Like an oyster."

"Then squat here. I'm goin' to orate."

## CHAPTER XI.

### A SQUEEZE AND A DISCOVERY.

"You got plenty o' money, Will. You won't mind helpin' me make a pony?"

"I'd give money, Harry, for the chance of helping you work out this affair. I never heard anything more interesting."

"I'm goin' to 'vestigate that there house with the red roof. I've got it in my noddle that that's the place. Kin you hide yer wheel anywhere and come along?"

A good hiding-place was found in the depths of a small thicket that fringed the sides of a running stream, and the boys made their way toward the house.

Harry, who was getting to be an old hand at this business, advised the utmost caution in approach, and they used every means of concealment as they drew near.

Finally they found themselves behind a hedge that surrounded the immediate grounds. From this point the house could be easily observed. It looked deserted; the lower shutters were tightly closed, and the upper ones nearly so, while not a sign of life was anywhere visible.

After several minutes of vigilant observation, Harry and Will started in opposite directions around the hedge, so as to see the house from all sides. They met at length in the road in front. All appeared the same. There was nothing to indicate that the house was inhabited.

Will was for proceeding to the immediate vicinity and making a closer investigation, but Harry was too cautious for this. It was not safe to trust appearances.

"Somehow it kinder looks too dead," he remarked. "I calculate we best go slow. Spose we ax somebody 'bout this place fu'st. You streak fur t'e house down the road there, behind them trees; I'll take the one down this way. Find out all you kin 'bout this shanty."

This plan was adopted, and the boys met by the hedge half an hour afterward.

"What luck?" asked Will.

"Mighty scaly luck. Couldn't git near my house on 'count of the blamed dogs; they howled like wild-cats. I'd bu'sted the head of one of 'em if I'd found a stone. But nary stone. Then I t'ddled on to the next house, and came across a surly old chap that didn't know nothin'. I don't b'lieve he knowed enough to come in when it rained."

"I had better luck," rejoined Will. "I met a very polite person, who told me the house had been empty for some time. He understood it was rented now, but the family had not moved into it."

"That's more like the thing."

"We met different kinds of people."

"Dunno 'bout that," remarked Harry. "I reckon if you'd gone my way and I'd gone your way, we'd had the same luck."

"Why?"

"It's clothes, that's why. 'Ye're got up like a gentleman, and me like a bootblack; and you know how to come the polite dodge, and I don't. I tell you, that counts."

"Think it does?"

"I know it does. I've been there."

What was to be done next? They had been long enough on the outside of the hedge. It seemed safe now to try the inside. With another careful look at the front of the house, the boys passed through the gate and approached the mansion.

They stopped and listened. All seemed deathly still within.

"We must try the doors and shutters," said Harry. "Some of them moughtn't be fastened."

"If they are, what then?"

"Then we'll have ter rig some way to climb to the second story. As long's there's nobody 'bout to hinder, we—"

He stopped abruptly, raised his hand in signal of attention, and stood intently listening.

Will did the same, and was soon aware of a slight sound from within the house. It grew louder.

"Dust's the word," exclaimed Harry, taking his companion by the arm and dragging him away.

He stopped behind a large bush that grew thickly near a corner of the house.

"What do you think it is?" asked Will, in a half-frightened tone.

"Not ghosts. Them things don't walk by daylight. Wait."

Their waiting was quickly rewarded. The click of a lock sounded, a door was heard to open, and a heavy step came upon the porch.

The boys looked curiously through their screen of leaves. They could dimly make out the form of a large man who seemed to be standing and looking about him.

After a minute or two he locked the door behind him, left the porch, and stepped upon the gravel walk. He could be seen now more easily. Harry started and gripped Will's arm tightly.



"Know him?" asked the latter, in a low voice.

"You bet," rejoined Harry.

Low as were those tones some sound from them seemed to reach the man. He lifted his head quickly, looked around him, and appeared to be on the point of making an investigation. But a moment's thought evidently convinced him that his ears had been deceived, and he walked on down the gravel path and into the road.

The scouts moved cautiously round the bush as he did so, so as to keep themselves safely screened. The man walked on, however, without further heed. He followed the road for some distance, and then took a path across the fields toward a railroad station that was visible in the distance.

"Who is he, Harry?"

"One o' them kidnappers. He's the old whisky vault I told ye of. Dunno his name, but he's sudden death on whisky bottles."

They waited till the man had full time to reach the station. Immediately afterward the whistle of an approaching train was heard.

"He's off fur York," suggested Harry. "D'ye know what I think?"

"No."

"Mr. Wilson's locked up somewhere in this shanty. I'm goin' to git in and find out."

"How?"

"I'll rig up some plan. I want you to stay here on the watch and guv' me the tip if anybody comes. Jist as sure's you're alive I'm goin' through that shanty."

At first sight the best means of obtaining access seemed to be by the porch. The shutters of the second floor windows over the porch were closed, but there was a possibility that they were not locked.

A railing ran along the porch front, and corner pillars sustained the roof. Harry was like a cat at climbing, and it did not take him long to reach the top of one of those pillars. To climb from this point to the roof was a much more difficult job, but by the aid of Will, who mounted the railing and helped him up, it was at last accomplished.

After resting himself for a minute from his severe labor, Harry approached the windows, with mingled hope and doubt. His hope soon disappeared. Every window was tightly fastened. He was no nearer success than he had been on the ground.

He stood cogitating. The third-floor windows were evidently not locked, but they were ten feet above him. How were they to be reached? Even if he had had a ladder, the sloping roof on which he stood would not have supported it. And there was momentary danger of some of the neighbors discovering his attempt.

"Things look squally, Will!" he called to his companion.

"They certainly do."

"I don't see nothin' else, though. Look around and see if you can't find a ladder."

Will was five minutes absent on this quest, and returned with a report of ill-luck.

"There is not a sign of one. I found nothing but a pole in the grass, and that don't look strong."

"Fetch it along! Something's got to be did!"

Will departed again. He returned after a shorter absence.

"The pole's gone up," he announced. "It was so rotten that it would not carry its own weight."

"That's bad!"

"But there's something else. I have made a discovery."

"What is that?" cried Harry, quickly.

"There is a cellar window back here that don't seem to be tight. One end of it is loose. We might work it out."

"Could a feller git down it?"

"With a tight squeeze."

"I'm in on tight squeezes. Here's fur the cellar window."

Harry descended the porch pillar in much less time than it had taken him to climb it. Springing to the grass, he called out cheerily:

"Where's that winder?"

"Here it is!"

Will led the way to the rear. The window he pointed to was closed by a wire framework, of which, as he had said, one end was loose.

It stood in a bricked recess, half above the ground level. Pulling it out as far as he could, Harry managed to get his arm behind it, and with some difficulty succeeded in unhooking the other end. In a moment more the screen lay on the ground.

As Will had said, it was a tight squeeze. The opening was not much wider than his body, while the recess threw it at an awkward angle.

He tried to force himself into the opening, but soon found himself fast, unable to move either up or down. It was evident that to force himself through would be to break his back.

"Pull me out, Will. I'm stuck," he cried.

It took a hard jerk to get him loose, he had wedged himself so tightly into the opening.

Getting on his feet again, he stood looking sourly at the window. He hated to acknowledge defeat.

"You'll have to give it up," said Will.

"Not much. I ain't built that way."

Harry had been studying the situation. The bricks which formed the recess had been set in rather shabby mortar, and time had weakened its holding powers. Some of them came out almost at a touch, and the shrewd boy soon had a cavity in the wall.

The earth backing to it, yielded to his heavy shoe, and a few hard kicks quickly made a sloping space back from the window.

"See that, lad!" he called triumphantly to Will.

"It's a regular toboggan slide. I can slip down it like a breeze."

In fact, he now had little difficulty, as he did not have to bend his body at an angle, as before. In a minute, with Will's aid, he had slipped through the opening, and was hanging to the inner edge of the window.

"Here goes!" he cried, loosing his hold. A fall of a couple of feet brought him to the cellar-floor.

"You keep up the lookout dodge, Will. Whistle twice down the cellar-window if there's any danger. I'm goin' ter slide through this house like a weasel through a rat-hole."

Enough light came through the window to enable him to make his way easily to the stairs. Mounting these, he found himself in a dark passageway. Fortunately, he had some matches in his pocket, and one or two of these enabled him to investigate this part of the house. The doors all stood open, and it was quickly evident that no person was concealed there.

A search of the second floor gave the same result. The third floor presented one large room in front and two smaller ones in the rear. The door of one of the latter was locked.

Harry tried it. It was securely fastened. The door was a heavy one, with a large lock. He shook it. It failed to yield, but a sound as of somebody moving came from behind it.

"Who's in there?" he cried.

"Who's out there?" came faintly from within.

"Is that you, Mr. Wilson?"

"Yes. Who are you?"

"I'm Harry Hal; the boy that found your pocketbook. I've been on the hunt for you, and I've found you."

"Open the door. Get me out of this prison and I'll make you rich."

"I can't. There is no key."

"Break it open. G-t an ax. Smash it in. Set me free, young man, and your fortune is made."

"It'll be wuth more than ten cents this time, hey?" Harry could not refrain from asking.

"Yes. Release me, and—"

"Hush!"

From far below there came very faintly the sound of a whistle, twice repeated.

"I've got ter slide," cried Harry. "There's the danger-signal. Keep a stiff upper lip, old man. I'll be back soon."

"You won't fail?"

"No. Keep mum. If you let this out it's all up. If I don't git back to-night, look for me to-morrow."

The signal came again.

"Danger's gittin' close. Good-by. Keep up yer spirits."

Down the stairs dashed the boy, at breakneck speed. As he reached the cellar-door he heard the sound of a key in the front-door lock.

Calling in a low tone to Will for aid, he scrambled up into the window, and was quickly pulled to the grass without.

"There are two of them," whispered Will. "The first one must have gone to the station to meet the other. I did not see them till they were close at hand."

"Let's fix this winder up ag'in. Won't do to leave it this way. Got to put it back as we found it."

## CHAPTER XII.

### ON A BLIND TRAIL.

HARRY's suggestion, expressed at the close of the last chapter, was not immediately carried out. A new thought came to him that made him pause.

"Let it stand a minute, Will," he remarked, "I'm goin' back."

"Stay where you are. It isn't safe."

"They won't catch me, nary time. I want to see them two chaps. Did you clap yer eyes on 'em?"

"Yes. One was the man we saw before. The other was a dark-skinned, Italian-looking fellow."

"With spec's on his eyes?"

"Yes, he wore large spectacles."

"Finelli, sure as shootin'. I'm goin' back, though. Wait. Won't be long."

Before he could oppose Harry had slid like an eel through the window. Will remained in doubt as to what he should do. His companion was certainly in danger. Should he go to his aid?

He was long in making up his mind, and before he was ready to act, Harry reappeared at the window.

"Guv us a lift, old lad," he said.

"Have you learned anything?" asked Will, curiously.

"Ain't I thought! I've made a discovery that's wuth a fortune. You bet I was fotched up all standin'. G-t the pig by the tail this time, sure."

"What is it?"

"No time to tell jist now. Let's fix up this winder and slide."

Darkness was falling rapidly as the two boys mounted their wheel and began their roll back to the city. A very good day's work had been put in. The beginning of the end was at hand.

"What did you learn?" asked Will, as they rolled rapidly along the level road.

"You won't leak?"

"Your secret is safe with me."

"It's jist the biggest go as was ever seen in this city of New York. A reg'lar eye-opener. I reckon you ought to know, Will. But my game's busted if you let it out."

"You can trust me."

"Here goes then. You've only got to keep mum fur a day or two."

Harry hereupon told Will a story which greatly interested and surprised him. Just what this story was the reader must wait to learn. It was a secret which we are not yet ready to reveal.

The evening was well advanced when the boys reached their homes, wearied by their exertions yet full of hope and enthusiasm.

Harry slept soundly that night, though not without dreams of success and fortune. An early business hour of the next day found him at the office of the banker.

Mr. Johnson advanced to meet him.

"Any news?" he asked.

"Big news. I'm goin' to finger them spondulicks. Let's git inside and chat. Too many ears round here."

Mr. Johnson led the way to the inner office, and seated himself, waiting quietly for Harry to open his budget.

Harry, however, had other purposes.

"Did ye answer that there fifty thousand dollar letter?" he asked.

"Yes. As the letter directed, I sent a messenger to a place in Central Park, where my answer was to be deposited in a cavity in a certain tree, which was described in the letter. This was the post-office arranged by the kidnappers, and we were given to understand that if the tree were watched our letter might remain there till doomsday."

"Mighty cute that. How did it work?"

"My letter was taken, and an answer returned, which I have here. It arranges a method by which the money can be paid and the prisoner returned, without danger to the kidnappers."

"I tell you, them fellers is wide awake. Who did you send fur messenger?"

"Finelli, the detective," answered Mr. Johnson, with a smile, as he felt that he had acted very shrewdly.

"You sent Fin? You sent the Dago? My eyes, if that ain't a go!" cried Harry, slapping his knees energetically.

"It wasn't a bad idea, eh?"

Harry looked at him in a curious manner, and broke into a laugh that vexed Mr. Johnson.

"What ails you, boy?"

"Oh, yes! it was cute. Fin was bound to fotch you an answer, if he had to write it hisself. You thought he'd git on their track?"

"I thought it possible."

"He didn't, I reckon?"

"No. He did not think it wise to show distrust."

"My eyes, it's cute!" exclaimed Harry, laughing in the same curious manner as before. He seemed unable to contain himself.

"See here, young man, I have had about enough of this," said Mr. Johnson, severely. "You see something very amusing perhaps, but I don't. And I am not fond of fun that is all on one side."

"I jist can't hold in!" broke out Harry. "I ain't told you all, Mr. Johnson, and ain't goin' to jist yit. All that I've got ter say now is that Fin's a sundowner. He'll keep without saltin' down, he will.—See here, that's a straight tip 'bout them six thousand?"

"If you fulfill your part of the bargain, I will fulfill mine."

"I'm 'feared not, if it's old Moneybags that's to do it. Every dollar o' them six thousand 'll squeal like a nipped rat afore it leaves his hand."

"You don't know Mr. Wilson. What I promise he will perform."

"He said he'd make me rich if I'd git him off."

"He will do it then. But what do you mean? Have you seen him?"

"No. But I've heard him. I know where he is, Mr. Johnson, and I'm goin' to earn that six thousand afore the sun peps out to-day."

"Where is he?" asked Mr. Johnson, with deep interest.

"Couldn't tell you that so's you could find it. You kin go 'long, if you want. That'd be better. I'm goin' to git friend Wallace and another policeman."

"Good. I'll be glad to go."

"And see here, Mr. Johnson, don't let this out in the office. And don't tell Finelli 'bout it. The dog's dead if he gits the hang of it."

"Finelli! Why do you distrust him so?"

"If I tell you, will you keep mum?"

"I will not breathe a word."

"Well, then, he's one of them kidnappers hisself."

"Finelli? Impossible!"

"Reckon it is. But it's true, fur all that."

Mr. Johnson fell into a minute's deep thought, while Harry closely watched him.

"If what you say is true it is of the utmost importance," he at length remarked. "You need not fear my speakin' now. The necessity of caution is too urgent."

"Seen Fin to-day?"

"No."

"Know if he's at his office?"

"I do not."

"Well, I want you to guv me a letter to him. Somethin' 'bout this job. Say I'm to wait fur an answer at his office."

"What's that for?"

"It's part of my game. I jist want to prospect a little, that's all. I ain't told you nor nobody all I know, and ain't goin' to jist yit."

Harry set his lips in firm decision. He evidently meant business. Mr. Johnson looked at him curiously. After a moment's hesitation he wrote a brief note.

"Don't do it up. I'll take it open. I want to show it, so folks 'll know I'm to wait."

Ten minutes afterward Harry was on the street, making his way toward Finelli's office. Reaching the vicinity of the building in which said office was situated he waited outside, watching all comers and goers.

His vigil did not last long. After a short time



Finelli himself came out and walked away. Harry watched him eagerly, taking good care to keep out of sight. Not till Finelli had vanished in the distance did he leave his covert.

"Reckon ye won't play no bull-calf game on me this time, Mr. Fin," considered Harry as he entered the building. "Somehow I've a notion that I hold the winning hand."

"Which is Mr. Finelli's room?" he asked of an attendant.

"Second floor, rear room; name on door. But he is out."

"Be back soon?"

"That I can't say."

"I've got a note for him, and was told to wait for an answer."

"Well, you can wait. If his room is open he will likely be back soon."

Without more words Harry sought the room in question. He tried the door. It was unlocked.

"Then he'll be back soon," he muttered. "I've got to be spry."

Spry enough he was. An open desk lay before him, its pigeon-holes well-filled with papers. Harry ran over these with rapidity, listening keenly for approaching steps as he did so. He had gone over about one-third of the papers when he stopped, with a look of high gratification in his face.

"Nailed for sure!" he cried, slapping his knee in his usual manner. "Got Fin down fine this time. Now I'll git."

He thrust one of the papers into his pocket, put the others back as he had found them, and hastily left the room. On the lower floor he met the man to whom he had before spoken.

"Will you giv this to Finelli when he comes back? I can't wait."

"All right," said the man, receiving the note.

A minute or two afterward Harry, from the opposite side of the street, saw Finelli approaching his office.

"Got you, Fin," said the boy triumphantly. "Got the nippers on you. I reckon I'm a pretty good detective myself. If I ain't I'm a rattlin' prentice."

At six o'clock that night a party of five left the cars at the railroad station in the vicinity of the red-roofed house. This party consisted of Harry Hale and Will Lindsay, Mr. Johnson, Officer Wallace, and another policeman in citizen's clothes. The policemen were duly provided with search-warrants, in case of any opposition to their proceedings.

It was not a long walk to their goal, and they were soon near by. The house looked as silent and dead as before. No trace of life could be seen or heard. There was no longer need of caution. They boldly approached.

The house was firmly locked up, as before.

"What's to be done?" asked Wallace. "Is it a sure enough thing to break in?"

"Sure! Bet it is!" rejoined Harry. "But I know a better way in than breakin'. Me and Will has been here before."

In a very few minutes he had the cellar window again open and in condition for entrance.

"Wait a minute," he said, as he slid in. "I'll open out quick."

In two minutes afterward the bolt of the back door was heard to slide, and the door opened with a creak.

"Come in," invited the scout.

"Where is Mr. Wilson confined?" demanded Mr. Johnson. "Lead us there at once."

"Foller me," said Harry.

Up-stairs they tramped in file. No sound was heard. The policemen went first, on the alert if the kidnappers should be encountered. But the third floor was reached without any trace of them being seen.

The door of the prison room was closely shut as before.

"This is the room," said Harry, knocking. "Hey, there, Mr. Wilson! Here I am back again, 'cordin' to promise."

No sound came from within.

The others pressed curiously up. The affair began to wear a questionable look.

"Maybe he's asleep, or somethin's happened to him."

"Try the door," suggested Wallace.

Harry did so. It opened to his hands. All eyes were turned to the open room. But no sign of the captive was visible! The room was empty! The bird had flown!

### CHAPTER XIII.

#### THE HOUSE IN HARLEM.

If ever there was a surprised boy it was Harry Hale. He stood looking into the empty room as if he could not believe his eyes. His sense of defeat was the more bitter that he saw the others looking at him with distrustful eyes.

"Sure's you're livin'," he was here last night!" exclaimed the discomfited scout. "I talked to him fur a good five minutes through that there door."

"If he was here last night where is he now?" asked Mr. Johnson, distrustfully.

"He's somewhere else," answered Harry, shortly.

"That we can depend on; but it looks, my boy, as if you had been making fools of us."

"I was here with him last night," remarked Will.

"What Harry says is the truth, every word of it."

"Were you in the house with him?"

"No."

"Then how can you be sure that he heard more than an echo?"

"That the boy was here I can testify," said Wallace, the policeman. "But he wasn't quite as sharp as I gave him credit for being. He has put the kid-

nappers on the alert, and they have removed their captive."

"What do you mean?" asked Mr. Johnson quickly, turning to him. "How can you possibly know this?"

"Here is my proof of it," rejoined Wallace, pointing to some dirt marks on the stairs and the floor of the passage. "Do you see these? They are foot-prints, and of the size of the boy's shoes. Put your foot here, Harry."

Harry did so. His foot just covered the clayey impression.

"After you worked at the window, youngster, you forgot to clean your shoes. The marks are faint here, but down-stairs they are stronger. You have left your trail through the whole house. No wonder the kidnappers took the alarm and removed their prisoner."

Harry struck his head violently with his clinched fist.

"I oughter go out and butt it 'gin' a brick wall," he said testily. "Ther ain't no more brains in it then in a carrot. A jolly detective I am! Me talkin' 'bout beatin' Fin! Won't somebody kick me?"

"The best of us are liable to make mistakes," rejoined Mr. Johnson. "You did the best you could, my boy. You are dealing with older heads, that's all. But you may have been deceived in the man you talked with through this door. If we only had some sure proof of Mr. Wilson having been here."

"What is this?" cried Will, who had been searching a closet in the room. "Here is a handkerchief. And here in the corner are the letters H. W."

Mr. Johnson snatched it from his hand.

"It is his handkerchief!" he cried. "Those are his initials. He has surely been here. But they have removed him, and we are as much in the dark as ever."

"Bet yer head we ain't, then!" exclaimed Harry, suddenly throwing off his depression and regaining his old vivacity. "We're jus' in broad daylight, we are. I know where they've tuk him to, and we kin nab him yit 'fore the night's over."

"Where?"

"It's in Harlem. That's near enough for now."

"Are you sure, this time?"

"I've quit bein' sure. But I'll go all I'm worth he's there. It's one o' their dens. I reckon they ain't got more nor a couple of 'em."

"True enough," rejoined Wallace. "You ain't wanting in good ideas, Harry."

"Then let us go there instantly, before they have time to take a new alarm."

"That's my idea," exclaimed Harry. "Strike while the iron's hot."

The suggestion was too good a one not to be acted on at once. They left the house as they had entered it, Harry rebolting the door and making his exit by the cellar window.

They made their way without delay to the railroad station, where it was learned that a train for the city was due in about an hour. This enforced delay did not agree very well with their impatience, but there was nothing to do but to cool their heels on the platform and await the slow coming of the cars.

While waiting Harry told them his reasons for believing he was still on the trail. He had been so mortified by his late failure that he did not care to bear the brunt of another.

"Finelli combined with them!" exclaimed Wallace. "Are you sure of this?"

"Sure's I'm standin' here."

"I would not have thought it. He has not been long on the force, but is considered a very capable and shrewd man."

"There's a fifty thousand pull in this. Detectin' don't pay that way. What's more, I ain't told you all I know 'bout Fin; and I ain't goin' to jist yit. But you kin bet he's a reg'lar salmon trout."

"There she whistles!" cried Will, as the shrill signal of the locomotive sounded in the distance.

In a few minutes more they were on board the train and rattling merrily off for the Harlem station. A few minutes more sufficed to bring them there. They landed, and the train rolled on toward its final resting-place in the great city.

"Now, folks, foller me," said Harry. "It's a good step out, but I reckon ye're all fresh and lively."

Night had now fallen. The street lamps were lit. Harry had little acquaintance with that part of the city, and after some doubtful efforts found himself obliged to seek the Elevated Railway station, and make that his point of departure. His difficulty was now at an end. He remembered his former route, and led the way directly to the scene of his recent exploit.

"There's the place," he said, stopping at a distance and pointing; "that house yonder that stands alone. I reckon we'd best dodge and prospect a little, and look out fur signs."

This suggestion was acted on. They separated, and approached the house cautiously from various directions, observing closely as they did so. But all remained quiet about the mansion; the only sign of life in it was that given by a light at an upper window. Everywhere darkness and stillness reigned.

They finally came together in front. After a consultation in a low tone, and a trial of the door, which proved to be locked, it was decided to station the second policeman at the rear door, place Will and Mr. Johnson at the windows on the two sides, and leave Harry and Wallace to seek an entrance by the front.

This arrangement was accordingly made. Wallace now gave a pull at the bell.

"Stand aside, Harry," he said. "Let me talk with whoever comes."

Harry did so. They waited for a minute or two.

Nobody came: Wallace gave a harder tug at the bell-pull. Still no answer. A third tug was given.

"This is the last, Harry," he said. "If there is no answer to this we must find some other way in. Ah! I think I have brought them. Steps are coming. Keep out of sight."

The door opened. Wallace saw before him a stout, oldish man, with a red and somewhat bloated face.

"Well, what do you want?" he asked.

"Does Mr. Wilson live here?"

The man started, as if in surprise and alarm, and seemed about to slam the door in the face of his visitor. Wallace advanced his foot over the threshold to prevent this. But a moment's thought seemed to give the inmate a different idea.

"No," he said, with some hesitation of manner. "He lives in the second house on this side. Good-night!"

He shut the door suddenly. It met with an obstruction, however, in the strong boot of the policeman, which was firmly planted within.

"Not so fast, old man! I am not done with you yet."

"Who are you? What do you want here? Take away your foot, or by the Rocky Mountains I'll give you a settler!" blustered the man, making a threatening movement toward the officer.

"Don't budge, Wallace! That's him! That's our game!" cried Harry, advancing.

"I judge it is. Keep still, man, or you'll get into trouble."

George Wilson, for it was he, found himself looking down the barrel of a revolver, and concluded to take this advice.

He stepped back trembling and with a blanched face.

"What do you want?" he hesitatingly asked.

"I want you!"

"Then, by the blazes, you won't get me!" cried Wilson, dashing back into the house.

Wallace and Harry followed.

The object of the fugitive was not clear, and the officer pursued him with all haste, hesitating to use his pistol till it should become necessary. His flight followed the lower passage. In a minute he had dashed into the rear room and was slipping the bolt of the back door.

He tore this open and leaped out. At the same moment Wallace gave a shrill whistle of alarm.

There was a cry outside, the sound of a struggle, and a blow.

"This way, Wallace! I've got him," came in the second policeman's voice.

Wallace ran out. It was not so sure that he had him for the two were struggling on somewhat even terms. But the arrival of a reinforcement soon settled the difficulty. In a minute more George Wilson was a prisoner, handcuffed and secure.

"The game's up, old man! Is your confederate in the house?"

The prisoner sullenly refused to answer.

"Very well. We'll soon learn. Hold him, Joe. We'll go through the establishment."

The captor remained on guard over the sullen prisoner, while the others entered the house. It took but a minute to search the lower floor. It was unfurnished and seemed to have been unused. There were no places of concealment.

"Try the cellar, Harry. We will go up-stairs."

Harry obeyed, lighting his way with matches. The cellar proved to be one long room, with no inclosure but a coal-bin. A glance was sufficient to prove that it contained no prisoner.

Leaving it, he hurried up-stairs after the others. It was evident that they had been through the second story. All the rooms were open. None of them seemed to contain any furniture except the one in which the light was still burning.

The sound of excited voices was heard from the floor above. There came a crash, as if a door had been forcibly burst open. Harry dashed for the stairs.

"Mr. Wilson!" came the voice of Mr. Johnson. "Fettered! Chained to the floor!" His tones were full of horror.

"Free, I think," answered the voice of Mr. Wilson with remarkable calmness. "It looks like a rescue."

"It is one!" cried Wallace. "We have counter-marched on the villains, and you are free."

"To whom do I owe it?" asked the prisoner.

"Where is the young lad with whom I talked yesterday, and who gave me hope of release?"

"Here!" cried Harry, springing into the room.

"And you owe your liberty to him," said Mr. Johnson. "He alone has traced the kidnappers and led us to their den."

"I shall not forget him," rejoined the now released captive, with a grateful look at Harry. "Now break this lock and set me free."

"How came you here? You were in another house yesterday."

"They took the alarm, and brought me here late last night, gagged and fettered."

In a few minutes more the fetters were broken, and the late prisoner stood forth, a free man!

### CHAPTER XIV.

#### A TRANSFORMATION SCENE.

THERE was quite an ovation at the banking house of Harvey Wilson on the morning after the events just narrated. All the persons concerned in the rescue were present, with those employed in the establishment, and the place was filled with the atmosphere of congratulation.

After shaking hands twice over with all his employees, Mr. Wilson entered his private office, ask-



ing Wallace and the two boys to accompany him. Mr. Johnson also formed one of the party.

"Have you sent for Finelli, the detective?" Mr. Wilson asked the latter.

"Yes. He will be here soon."

"Take care nobody outside tips him the wink," suggested Harry. "If Fin knows you're here he'll make sudden tracks!"

"Finelli? Why?"

"'Cause he'll be afeard the old chap we nabbed mought split on him!"

"What do you mean?" asked Mr. Wilson.

"You ain't lettin' on you don't know that Fin's one o' them kidnappers?"

"Finelli?—Impossible!"

"Reckon it is; but it's true, all the same!"

"Finelli? An officer of the law? What nonsense is this, boy?"

"Fifty thousand dollars is a big stake. Detect'in' don't pay like that. And that ain't all. Jist wait till I git through with my eye-openers! Tell ye what, friend Wallace, when Fin comes in, don't let him slip out ag'in. He mought have sudden bizness 'cross the street, and jist now we can't spare him."

"I will take care of that."

"You offered the boy a reward, I b. lieve," asked the banker of Mr. Johnson.

"Yes; three thousand dollars for your recovery, and as much more for the capture of the villains."

"The first has been earned, and shall be paid. As for the second, we have only got one of the men yet."

"The others are Fin and Bill Fisk," exclaimed Harry. "I'll giv you them both inside an hour."

"If you do the money is yours. And I would willingly make the sum ten thousand for the recovery of that stolen document."

"You would?" cried Harry, in delight.

"Yes.—Do you know anything of it?"

"Don't I, then? I'm goin' fur them ten thousand flat-footed.—You hear me?"

Further conversation was interrupted by the entrance of Finelli, who walked briskly into the room, but stopped hastily on seeing Mr. Wilson. His face grew pale under all its dark hue, and he visibly trembled.

Wallace, in accordance with Harry's suggestion, set his back sturdily against the door.

"Mr. Wilson!" exclaimed the detective, in a shaken voice.

"At your service," replied the banker. "You were rather too slow in your work, Mr. Finelli, and I concluded not to wait on your movements."

"I—I don't understand this," Finelli looked nervously around him. He did not fail to catch sight of the stalwart policeman, with his back to the door.

"It means just this," rejoined the banker. "I had other detectives on my track besides you, and they have had better luck. I was released last night, and one of the kidnappers caught."

"Other detectives?" Finelli seemed so shaken up that all his nerve was gone.

"You bet!" cried Harry. "I was one of 'em, Fin. Got tired o' huntin' over Jersey City fur bull-calves, and reckoned I'd go fur bigger game.—Struck ile, too, Fin!"

"What does all this mean, Mr. Wilson?" demanded the detective. "I see you are free, but do not know how it was managed. I have been tracking the kidnappers, have traced them to their den, and would have rescued you to-day. Somebody, it seems, has got ahead of me."

"It looks that way, Finelli."

"All he wanted was a fifty thousand pill, and he'd fotched you on the spot," Harry declared.

"You young hound, what do you mean?" exclaimed Finelli in the best of English, his dark face glowing with anger.

"I mean that you're spotted, that's what! You're one o' them kidnappers yerself; and you've been playin' a nice little come and go game on these folks."

An oath broke from Finelli's lips. He made a fierce grasp for the boy, but was checked by the strong arm of Wallace.

"Not so fast, Finelli. I fancy the boy is right. Here is a second witness," pointing to Will. "He saw you in league with the man we captured."

"It's an infernal lie!" roared Finelli, though his face blanched again. "I defy you to prove anything of the kind."

"We will wait to see what your confederate has to say to that, Mr. Finelli," said Mr. Wilson calmly. "If what these boys say should be true—"

"It is a lie, I say," repeated Finelli, hoarsely. "If you want to know more you will find me at my office." He turned to go.

"Not so fast, Finelli. We can't spare you," remarked Wallace, guarding the door.

"Have you a warrant to stop me?—Out of my path or I'll make you sweat."

"The accusation against you is warrant enough. I will take the risk of sweating."

"He's number two of the rascals," averred Harry. "Hold on to him like grim death. If we only had Bill Fisk now we'd have the whole gang, and I'd earn my three thousand."

"Very true," replied Mr. Wilson. "I have reason to know Fisk well. I have seen too much of him these few days past. Put him into our hands and the money is yours."

"That's what I'm here for."

"What! can you do it?"

"Reckon I can. And mighty sudden too. Ever been to the theater, Mr. Wilson?"

"Why do you ask such a question?"

"Ever seen one o' them transformation scenes?"

"Yes."

"Like to see another?"

"What nonsense is this?"

"Show you one, anyhow, and won't charge only three thousand for the ticket."

As he spoke Harry had edged up behind Finelli, who stood with his eyes warily fixed on Wallace, as if half inclined to make a break for liberty.

In an instant the quick-motioned boy, with an upward sweep of his arm, knocked off the hat of the detective, and with it a black wig, revealing a close cut crop of sandy hair beneath.

Finelli turned in fury toward him, but this was just what the shrewd boy wanted. Another quick movement brought down over the dusky face of the Italian a sponge full of water, which Harry had held concealed in his left hand. Off went the spectacles which shielded his eyes, and off with them went most of his dusky hue! The dark-faced Italian was in an instant changed into a light-complexioned individual. Only the black mustache and whisker remained of his former appearance. These also went, under another quick stroke from the boy's hand.

"There's yer transformation, Mr. Wilson! Know him now?"

"Fisk, by all that's good!"

"Bill Fisk, and as pretty a little joker as ever you seen."

The discovered villain made a tiger-like clutch at the boy, but Harry slipped away like an eel. Before he could make another movement Wallace had him by the shoulder.

"Keep quiet, my man, or it will be worse for you.—By Heaven, boy, but you have unearthed a villainous game. So Finelli, the detective, and Fisk, the rascal, are one and the same!"

"I am astounded!" exclaimed Mr. Wilson. "This is the man who held me prisoner.—He and—" he hesitated.

"Your brother, George Wilson," interrupted Fisk, spitefully. "No use to try to hide that. You can take the disgrace of it."

"Yes, he is my brother," acknowledged the banker. "And a pair of unmitigated scamps you and he are. I owe you more than I can ever repay you," he continued, turning to Harry. "How did you discover this masquerade, which has deceived us all?"

"I see'd Fin takin' off his outside; there in that East River house. He was gittin' ready fur a call on you, I reckon. Didn't know I was peepin'—Told ye all along that Fin was a sundowner.—Ain't he one though!—But, I calculate I'm a bit of a eye-opener myself."

During this talk Fisk had stood glaring from one to another, the picture of suppressed fury and dismay. Only the strong grasp of the officer prevented him from springing with the rage of a madman on the triumphant boy.

Now, with a sudden change of expression, he turned to Mr. Wilson:

"You have discovered my secret, it seems. What do you intend to do?"

"To punish you for your dastardly action to the full extent of the law."

"Very well.—But if I am not free by night that little document will be made public, I hold the winning hand, Harry Wilson. Unless you want all the world to know what that document contains you'll be careful what you do."

This threat affected Mr. Wilson, strangely. His chin fell on his breast and a dejected look came upon his face.

"What is your price for it?" he at length asked.

"Freedom, and ten thousand dollars. Not a cent less."

A dozen conflicting emotions showed themselves in the banker's face. He seemed affected by a series of doubts and dreads, mingled with the desire for revenge.

"I accept the terms," he at length said, in a tone as if the words were torn from him by force.

"All correct," exclaimed Harry, pressing eagerly forward. "But, not from him."

"Not from him? Why not?"

"He can't sell what he ain't got."

"I don't understand you, boy. Is this some new mystery?"

"Nary mystery!" protested the boy. "Them ten thousand is mine, and here's yer dokyment!"

He drew a folded paper from his pocket and handed it to the banker, who almost leaped with surprise and joy on opening it.

Fisk, on his part, was the picture of consternation.

"It is the stolen document!" exclaimed the overjoyed banker. "Where—how did you get it?"

"I'll be your death, you young thief!" hissed Fisk, in fury.

"Bill Fisk oughtn't to hid sich a vallyble dockyment in Finelli's desk," retorted Harry. "It wasn't smart!"

This was a crushing blow. The villain's last card had been played, and had failed. His head drooped; a look of dismay and fear overspread his face; his late defiant attitude was changed to one of defeat.

At a sign from the banker, Wallace led him away, as crestfallen a specimen of humanity as it would be easy to see.

Mr. Johnson, Harry and Will remained. The banker turned to Harry with a grateful look.

"My promise shall be kept! and, more than kept," he said. "You have exposed one of the most well-laid schemes that was ever devised, and have saved me from serious loss and danger. To think of this fellow playing the double part of detective and rogue! An artful scheme indeed!"

"He shut my eye up the worst way," explained Harry. "I've been follerin' Fin sharp, and 'ind o' got mixed up between him and Fisk. Only got straightened out nigh afore last, when I seen him peelin'. Then I struck square fur Fin's office, went

through his papers, and lighted on *that*. I don't want nothin' fur it, Mr. Wilson. It was my bizness to giv it back with the pocketbook; and I've done it now."

"You shall be rewarded, nevertheless. As to what this document contains, I will only say this: It represents a criminal action of my dissolute brother, and if made public would reflect disgrace on me and my family. That is why I want it so badly. I would give my fortune to avert disgrace to my name. I do not destroy it, because it gives me a hold on George Wilson. Did he dare, he could give me no end of trouble about my property. He has an awkward claim. But, while I hold this he dare not move.—I shall take the best of care it shall not be lost again."

What more shall we say? That the pair of villains were punished for their crime scarcely need be said. Fisk suffered most severely, there being against him the extra charge of personating a detective for the purpose of consummating crime.

It was proved that he had played this double part for a considerable period, and had aided and abetted in more than one robbery under his mask of detective. Ten years to consider the enormity of his misdeeds was none too heavy a sentence.

As for the Curbstone Detective Mr. Wilson did not fail to keep his promises. A small fortune was placed to his credit, and he was given a position in the banking house which he still fills with credit to himself and satisfaction to his employer.

The grateful banker proved anything but the miser which Harry's first experience of him led him to believe.

Jake Brown, Harry's old chum, was not forgotten by his faithful partner. He got in due time the fifty dollars promised him, and this sum was doubled by the banker on learning the useful part which Jake had played in his rescue.

But the skipper of the Lively Nelly found business in another part of the country when these events were made public. The part he had played in them was one that might have won him a home in the State Prison, so he judged it wise to emigrate.

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